

Journal of Awareness-Based Systems Change



FEATURE ARTICLES

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Peter Westoby

Embodying Experiential Learning

Vivianna Rodriguez Carreon and Penny Vozniak

The Reflexible Person

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The New Paradigm Is Already Here

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Realizing Collective Capacities to Navigate Complexity

Raghav Rajagopalan

Striving for Justice

Ermal Kirby, Jill Marsh, Charity Nzegwu, Bevan Powell, and Adrian Roux, with Sue Miller and Megan Seneque

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Contents

EDITORIAL

- 1 **Journal of Awareness-Based Systems Change: Moving from Transactional to Relational**
Oliver Koenig, Megan Seneque, Eva Pomeroy, and Otto Scharmer

COMMENTARY

- 9 **Awareness Based Systems Change and Racial Justice**
Dayna Cunningham

FEATURE ARTICLES

- 15 **Reversing The “Eclipse of Relationality”:
An Ontology and Phenomenology of Healing Culture**
Peter Westoby
- 31 **Embodying Experiential Learning: Cultivating Inner Peace in Higher Education**
Vivianna Rodriguez Carreon and Penny Vozniak
- 51 **The Reflexible Person: Toward an Epistemological Learning Culture**
Rolf Arnold and Michael Schön
- 73 **The New Paradigm is Already Here:
The Practicing of Prototypes of Future through Vertical Alignment**
Kirsi Hakio

BOOK REVIEW

- 95 **A Learning Journey through a Heart-Centered Book: A Review of Wilson, P. A. (2019). The Heart of Community Engagement: Practitioner Stories from across the Globe. Routledge.**
Wendy Allen and Lori Ryan

IN THE MAKING

- 101 **Systems Sensing and Systemic Constellations for Organizational Transformation:
Building Collective Capacity for Navigating Complexity**
Luea Ritter and Nancy Zamierowski

DISCUSSION

- 117 **Realizing Collective Capacities to Navigate Complexity:
Topological Sensing Works, but We Know Not How and Why**
Raghav Rajagopalan

IN DIALOGUE

- 127 **Striving for Justice: Journeying with the Methodist Church in Britain**
Ermal Kirby, Jill Marsh, Charity Nzegwu, Bevan Powell, and Adrian Roux, with Sue Miller and Megan Seneque

Editorial

Journal of Awareness-Based Systems Change

Moving from Transactional to Relational

Oliver Koenig, Eva Pomeroy, Megan Seneque, and Otto Scharmer

With this second issue, the Journal of Awareness Based Systems Change is completing its first volume. For a new journal, its reception has been remarkable, with over 15.000 abstract views and file downloads in the first seven months since its inception. In the editorial of the inaugural issue, entitled *The Birth of a Journal* (Koenig, Seneque, Pomeroy & Scharmer, 2021), we laid out the journal's intention: to develop a platform that makes visible the growing body of trans-disciplinary work supporting and advancing systems change through awareness-based methodologies and approaches. Integral to this intention are two underlying assumptions. First, the knowing needed to inform effective, regenerative change extends beyond the rational-cognitive realm privileged in so many of our systems and structures. Thus, we aim to support the extension of epistemologies that inform action to embrace relational, aesthetic, embodied and intuitive knowing on both individual and collective levels. Second, we contend that systems change from an awareness-based perspective is only possible if we make visible and interrogate two interconnected cycles at play in social reality creation: the re-generative forces and capacities of Presencing as well as its destructive counterpart of Absencing (Scharmer, 2016, 2018). This means

examining power—where it lies, how it shapes our systems and structures and how it is experienced, both inside us and between us.

More than half a year has passed since the release of the inaugural issue in March of 2021, and the world is still under the collective grip of the global Covid-19 pandemic. Polarization, at least in countries of the global north, has reached new worrying heights and, in many instances, has deepened existing division lines (Druckman et al., 2020). The past weeks also marked the closing of the COP 26 UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow. For researchers and climate activists alike, the results of COP26 marked a dangerous compromise, with the announced targets for 2030 leading the earth to a 2,4 Celsius temperature increase by the end of the century (Climate Change Tracker, 2021). Indicatively the single largest delegation that had attended the COP26 was not a sovereign nation-state but lobbyists from the fossil fuel industry (Corporate Europe Observatory, 2021). The threshold we are facing as humanity is more evident than ever and the need to act collectively, generatively and systemically increasingly urgent.

What can lead us out of the self-inflicted deadlock and polarization, and how can we find ways that will enable us to successfully meet the challenges of the Anthropocene in the 21st century? The era of the lone hero-leader is long past as the scale and universality of issues like the climate crisis require an entirely new way of operating in every sector and around the world. This editorial is entitled "Moving from transactional to relational" which we read as one of the central themes running through all of the contributions in this second issue in different permutations: sometimes positioned as figure and sometimes as ground and with a focus on different sectors. In one way or another, all of the articles provide a sharp and critical diagnosis of our current moment, its dominating forces and ways of exercising power (over). A common narrative thread is that for too long we have been confined and restrained by western and hegemonic notions of rationalism, reductionism, empiricism, mechanism, dualism, and causality (Lange, 2018), which have particularly become embedded in the field of education. The move from transactional to relational on a systemic level is one that requires a substantive reevaluation of the ontological and epistemological positions and foundations that make up the fabric of social institutions and systems. It also requires to look at the various (unintended) consequences hegemonic epistemologies have inflicted and still inflict on humankind, having led to and manifesting themselves as various disconnects.

These disconnects can also be seen as manifestations of what Scharmer calls the three divides of our times: the ecological, the social, and the spiritual (Scharmer, 2016). All of these disconnects function in reciprocal ways. The way they appear and manifest seriously limits and restrains our individual and collective ability to address the complex issues and crises we are and will be facing. What is needed is the epistemological and ontological shift that has been framed as the relational turn (e.g., Emirbayer, 1997). Drawing from this turn, Spretnak reminds us:

"...all entities in the natural world, including us, are thoroughly relational beings of great complexity, who are both composed of and nested within contextual networks of dynamics and reciprocal relationships. We are made entirely of relationships, as is the whole of the natural world." (2011, p. 4).

Such a turn requires both an expansion of our conception of humanness—as Galtung claimed necessary back in lectures from 1958 (Galtung, 2009)—and new action actions that allow us to radically re-connect with the planet, with one another and with our own innate (highest) potential to evolve and expand human consciousness.

All of these moves and turns require us to hold significant complexity—the complexity of our own multi-faceted being and that of others, as well as the multitude of inter-experience. In this way, moving from transactional to relational is a counter to polarization. Because relationship is fundamentally about connection, this move is also a counter to disconnection.

Taking the example of an African Indigenous wisdom tradition, Ubuntu, Martin Kalungu-Banda (2021, para 4) writes:

"Each being, animate or inanimate, possesses a life-force. This life-force connects all beings in one existence. For an African (and for many wisdom traditions), the soil and the stone contain a life-force. They are alive. Just like the human, the animal and the plant. This is why we treat every being with awe."

Mirroring this observation, recognition of relational and embodied ways of knowing are being reanimated in Indigenous research methodologies. Chilisa (2012), in particular explores, a relational ontology, epistemology and axiology, and the implications for research practices. She develops a relational axiology that is "embedded in the *ubuntu* relational ontology principles of (1) I am we, I am because we are; (2) relations of people with the living and the nonliving; and (3) spirituality, love, harmony, and community building" (Chilisa, 2012, p. 117). The mere act of apprehending such a mutual co-existence for Lange (2018) is a deeply ethical matter, one which calls upon us and our shared "responsibility for the lively relationalities of becoming, of which we are a part" (Lange, 2018). As an editorial team which is, as yet, solely composed of non-Indigenous academics we too, must embody, as Poirier (2008, p. 74) writes, a "position as apprentice and recognize the authority of our Indigenous teachers in the domain".

The articles in this issue speak from or to an emergent and relational body of knowing, and they regard this knowing as the source of right action that serves the well-being of individuals, organizations, communities and the planet. In doing so they suggest ways forward. Be it in our ways of thinking or by providing concrete and potentially actionable ideas, they offer possible means to tap into and activate what lies available as dormant possibilities (potentialities of becoming) in people and in the systems, they shape together.

Contributions of This Issue

Bracketing the contributions from this issue both the “Commentary from the field” as well as “In Dialogue” speak to issues of social and racial (in-)justice and to the historically created in-built mindsets and practices within our political and cultural institutions that sustain them.

In a personal account, Dayna Cunningham’s *Commentary from the Field* discussed what awareness-based systems change, and in particular Theory U, has to offer to social and racial justice work. She contends that with an open mind we can intentionally look at the racialized violence around us and the dehumanization that it has caused and still causes. But it is only through an open heart and a caring gaze that we can shift these structures of violence and turn to effective action that is more than just euphemistically ‘creating space at the table’.

Adrian Roux, Bevan Powell, Charity Nzegwu, Ermal Kirby and Jill Marsh are *In Dialogue* together with Megan Seneque and Sue Miller about the intersection of theology and racial justice in Black ministry. Representing a group of people, both ordained and lay from the Methodist Church in Great Britain, having engaged in an awareness-based systems change process they talk about what shaping an inclusive community means to them. In mirroring the inward-outward move discussed above their dialogue illuminates two things: First, it uncovers personal motivations and key influences which have contributed to the dialogue partners’ own sense of calling to this work which led them to personal and collective action. Second, it highlights pathways on how justice, dignity and solidarity can be brought to life throughout all dimensions of the Church.

Opening up the line of peer-reviewed Original Articles, Peter Westoby’s theoretical contribution frames this issue’s theme most vividly as the dawn of an eclipse of relationality which has led to an alienation from the manifestations of life, both around us as well as within ourselves. As alternative, he offers both an ontological and a phenomenological pathway. On the ontological dimension, he proposes a new way of being that is experienced through a living polarity between the ideas enfolded within Jung’s theory of individuation and Buber’s theorizing about dialogue which allows to re-experience an intimacy with both one’s Self and the Other. He reasons that such an ontological turn also demands a new kind of phenomenological—both social and ecological—perceptivity, one that departs from and leads back to the living process.

Shedding light on the field of higher education, Vivianna Rodriguez Carreon and Penny Vozniak present a craft in experiential teaching and embodied learning in a postgraduate course for peacebuilders and change-makers. Yet, they also intend to show how awareness and arts based practices in conjunction with methodologies and readings from Indigenous and phenomenological wisdom traditions philosophies hold the potential to overcome fragmentation (of the self) and evolve the human potential for a richer and more nuanced granularity of modes of expression beyond what is (and can be) written. Written, in itself, in a

non-linear fashion, the paper offers the reader an ontological invitation to experience the unconventional unfolding of the course and engage in and with different literacies.

In an analytical paper, Michael Schön and Rolf Arnold delineate how the systems of vocational and higher education, both in terms of their governance as well as their prevailing practices, have fallen short on their own programmatic aspiration to prepare students to meet the demands the future holds. (Awareness-based) systems change efforts in the field of education can only succeed, they argue, if we approach them with fresh thinking and through a deeper source of creativity. For the authors, both of these demands can be found in the figure of the “reflexible person” for whose personality formation educational systems should be held accountable. To that end students need not only be equipped with abilities to observe what is going on in the outside world but also with the skillset necessary to observe and reflect in ways that include the self as the central locus for self-transformation.

As the fourth and final Original Article, Kirsi Hakio, presents an applied perspective on imagining together alternative ways of living with the Earth. In further developing the concept of Vertical Alignment as one’s ability to move between different levels of attention, she draws upon and connects theoretical literature from the field of care ethics with empirical observations made in a design-based case study. In the latter, she gives a detailed account of the research collaboration between herself and an entrepreneurial couple in the field of nature tourism. Together they set out to construct and explore a prototype of future culture based on care and awareness-based co-creation.

A new feature in this second issue is a Book Review. Wendy Allen & Lori Ryan do not just introduce and review Patricia Wilson’s book *The Heart of Community Engagement: Practitioner Stories from Across the Globe* but also show how it had been used as part of a collective learning journey by students in a graduate program in early childhood leadership in a course on community-based action research.

Lastly, also this issue showcases an “In the Making” Contribution as well as a “Discussant Commentary” in response. Luea Ritter & Nancy Zamierowski introduce and reflect on the use of systemic constellations and systems sensing as a participatory and inquiry-based action research approach to help organizations build collective capacity for navigating complexity. The article takes the reader inside the experience of systems sensing with an action research pilot study conducted with organizations working for social change. In his “Discussant Commentary” Raghav Rajagopalan consider the article’s primary contribution to the literature on awareness-based systems change as offering a valuable testimony to collective sensing, not as an idiosyncratic or imaginal, but rather as key data for systems to understand themselves.

As we put this second issue out into the world, we do so holding our initial intention to make visible and accessible the knowledge base needed to face our current challenges through awareness-based transformation. We invite you to

experience each contribution as a manifestation of that intention—as small pieces of the larger picture of societal regeneration of which we are all a part. As Dr. Noel Nannup, the respected Aboriginal Elder and Board member of this Journal, put it so succinctly in his GAIA Journey opening address: “All we need to do is to have a piece of the path to the future and that is ours; and we polish that and we hone that, and we place that in the pathway that we are building, and of course as we build that pathway it changes us as the builders of the path and it also shapes the destination we are going to.” (Nannup, 2020, 0:33)

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Commentary from the Field

Awareness-Based Systems Change and Racial Justice

Dayna Cunningham

Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life, Tufts University
Dayna.Cunningham@tufts.edu

I'm a voting rights lawyer by training, and I left the law because I was disenchanted with legal practice as a mechanism for righting societal wrongs. My African American clients wanted a voice and to be free to shape their own development trajectory, their own future. I worked in the deep South in the US, the place of the former slavery-based agricultural empire that built the wealth of the United States. The idea that Black people wanted to be free was considered an outright insult to the existing power structures. Not just to the institutions: I encountered many White people who took it as a personal affront that Black people intended to be free. That sense of umbrage was excruciating to witness. I realized that despite all of my professional training and efforts, my legal work could not address the underlying cultural and moral disability that human enslavement has wrought in this country. It is a problem of the heart and the spirit that we decide as a nation who matters and who does not; who is within the circle of concern and who is beyond it as a lesser form of humanity. Legal work is an incredibly important part of any effort to make ours a more perfect

union. But, for me, the law was too blunt an instrument for the subtle work of opening people's hearts.

I left the law and, while at MIT Sloan School, I discovered the Presencing Institute's Theory U (Scharmer 2016, 2018), an awareness-based systems change approach. What awareness-based systems change, and Theory U in particular has to offer to social and racial justice work, is a method and tools for opening people's hearts. It offers the invitation to turn the beam of observation back on the self and to view the self and system with an open mind (curiosity), open heart (compassion) and open will (courage). My teacher at Sloan, Otto Scharmer, presented this in a lecture and I immediately knew it could help address the challenges I had been struggling with as a racial justice lawyer.

Many of our political and cultural institutions were created by, rooted in, and built to ensure the mindsets and practices that sustain social violence. And often, debates about the structural roots of racism, give rise to frustration and fear. How can humans transform institutions? But I honestly believe that humans are the only ones that can transform them! I believe that structural violence is actually a series of societal agreements, captured in policies, practices, rules and habits, that collectively we will not pay attention to a set of humans—BIPOC, undocumented, LGBTQ and others—whom we deem less human than ourselves. The way we transform structures then, is to pay attention to people's humanity and to attend to the social circumstances that enliven/legitimate dehumanization or, in the reverse, can cultivate a sense of empathy and care. How can awareness-based systems change help us do this?

First, an awareness-based approach invites us to *look* where we have previously not looked. About the George Floyd murder, my yoga teacher, Brandon Compagnone, told his students that he went online and watched the entire 8 minutes and 46 seconds. He admitted that it was very painful, but that he felt compelled to witness it. "That was my neck; it was your neck. We cannot avert our gaze from the knee on our collective body." So that is the first task now in this moment of racial reckoning in the US and elsewhere: to see, to witness and not look away from the systemic racism and violence that shapes our collective existence.

What has really struck me in this moment is how hungry well-meaning White people are for forgiveness, even as they avert their gaze. I have customarily responded to this hunger with a gesture of comfort and understanding. But, I have come to believe that in addition to being personally exhausting, such gestures actually are not helpful. They divert from the deep look inward, the unsparing inquiry into the source of our opinions and values that is integral to awareness-based systems change. Instead, now I request that White people look at the racialized violence around us. Really see what it is and absorb for themselves what the lack of attention, the dehumanization, does. Forgiveness is not relevant. It is not to say that every White person is guilty, it is to say that you have work to do, and it is not my work. It is your work. It is the work of collectively witnessing and holding this shared trauma that is visited

generation upon generation upon people who are considered less human. To be clear, I have my own work to do in this realm to understand how structural violence has shaped my awareness.

Second, awareness-based systems change invites us to look with an open heart. Elsewhere I have spoken of anger and, in the case of racial injustice, anger plays a role. But anger alone will not resolve what is in front of us. The invitation is to pivot from anger to tenderness. This is excruciatingly hard to do, but absolutely essential. One brings a different kind of attention if anger awakens the need for a tender heart. It is the caring gaze, the listening heart that can shift structures of violence. At the same time, the pivot from anger to tenderness has to be accompanied by an urgent request not to turn away from the suffering but really to allow it to inhabit your heart because that is actually the pathway to tenderness.

Third, awareness-based systems change connects the tender heart to effective action in the world. When you have a rushing train off of which people are constantly being pushed, you cannot just say, “I’ll love the people on the train.” You also have to help stop the train. In the scheme of things, stopping the train is a bit like the task, in the words of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, of “bending the arc of the moral universe towards justice.” It is massive, multi-layered and multi-generational. It requires all hands aboard; no one is trivial or inconsequential. Sometimes within social justice work, a sensibility among elites is to *reach out to* and *make space at the table for* people who have been marginalized within social systems. This is trivializing and counter-productive.

People who have experienced the sharpest edges of institutional and systems failure are an integral part of those systems; their lived experience gives crucially necessary insights into how systems function and how we collectively might reinvent them. Social and racial justice work is not about creating a space for people who have been marginalized. Connecting the tender heart to effective action is about understanding the urgent need to see from the whole, which cannot exclude anyone, especially people who have been marginalized. The shift in energy from “we are creating a space at our table for you,” to “we are collectively working to see from the whole and address the problems challenging all of us,” is a subtle but significant shift.

Key to awareness-based systems change is the concept of the social field. To me the social field is one way of describing the social context or social body, and I describe it as like a farmer’s field. In any given context in which humans are gathered, whether it is a family, a classroom, a protest or a hospital room, there is communication, there is history, there is habit, there is culture, there are gestures, and all of that is like a farmer’s field. In a farmer’s field there are weeds and rocks and roots and bugs. And what is cultivated is what grows. Understanding that we are existing within a field, and that we have the capacity to cultivate it toward more generative, or more violent outcomes is a powerful leadership tool in racial justice work.

The core practices of awareness-based systems change—deep and empathic listening, cultivating curiosity (open mind), compassion (open heart) and courage (open will) help us to cultivate the social field and help us see from the whole.

Within communities that have confronted structural violence over generations, we use the tools of awareness-based systems change to explore the structures in the community that are generating such unrelenting violence. I am using the term “structural violence” to mean the violence of inattention in governance and policy, as well as the physical violence of police, and of neighbors who have internalized that violence. Structural violence depletes the sense of self, and so turning the beam of observation back is about discovering the impact of this violence on your soul, recognizing it and creating space between you and that beast so as to be able to regenerate your own soul. Turning the beam back on yourself is also about re-affirming your worth as a human being. Practically, this requires space for healing and reflection, a lot of time for check-ins to process ongoing levels of struggle and trauma. The check-ins create a sturdy container of trust and openness.

It is easy to lose track and get discouraged in this work. Reflection and awareness-based practices have helped me to find my North Star, the orienting point that exists at the outer reaches of my gaze but towards which I am always moving. My North Star helps me inhabit that space in the heart of my deepest values that are grounded in humanity. We betray ourselves when we lose confidence in that orientation or when we let ego and doubt cloud our sightline to that path. My North Star also helps me discern the scope of the task ahead, to understand that it is multi-generational, to wrestle with the ways I have internalized structural violence, and to stay focused on the small role that I must play in helping to bend the arc.

I am constantly inquiring into how I might manifest through my own presence the cultivation of a generative space. How might I listen and attend and speak and gesture and regard people in a way that supports empathy and learning and growth and lessens the possibility of damage and harm and violence? Through my silence and observing and listening—and my words and my actions, I am working to shift my own consciousness that sometimes dwells on anger and despair, and to also shift the consciousness in the room. It is not just “if I talk nice I’ll get through this meeting.” It is “if I attend to cultivating this space, collectively we could make extraordinary breakthroughs.” To know that we have that capability within us—and that it is a multiplier power—is itself empowering.

You don’t unmake centuries of injustice and violence by being generative in a room, but you do help the social body in the room become more effective at the thing they are trying to do—beginning to address centuries of injustice and violence. That is the potential of awareness-based systems change. And, for me, it is such a relief. It is such a relief to know that we can have that.

Dayna Cunningham is the Dean of Tufts University's Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life. The only university-wide college of its kind, Tisch College studies and promotes the civic and political engagement of young people at Tufts University, in our communities, and in our democracy. Learn more at: tischcollege.tufts.edu.

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Peer-Reviewed Article

Reversing the “Eclipse of Relationality”:

An Ontology and Phenomenology of Healing Culture

Peter Westoby

*School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Deakin University
Centre for Development Support, University of Free State
peter_westoby@yahoo.com*

Abstract

The Jewish philosopher Martin Buber talked about, living under the shadow of Auschwitz, that humanity lived with the ‘eclipse of God’. I now wonder if we have moved beyond this ‘eclipse of God’ to a time of the ‘eclipse of relationality’.

This article argues that the eclipse of relationality is enabled through a predominant worldview in which the world is understood as mechanical and dead—observed and experienced in increasingly abstract form. In this way of being, the world and the ‘other’, cannot be loved.

In light of this eclipse, this article offers two pathways back to life, particularly for practitioners concerned with healing culture. The first is ontological—a new way of being that is experienced through a living polarity between the ideas enfolded within Jung’s theory of individuation and Buber’s dialogical theorizing. The second is phenomenological—a new kind of social and ecological practice linked to a perceptivity of living process, traced from Carl Jung and James Hillman, to Mary Watkins, Henri Bortoft and Allan Kaplan.

The key wisdom from this article, from travelling down these two pathways—the key theorizing of a way forward for cultural healers—is that people increasingly spend so much of their life separated, a-part, lacking intimacy with another, or with the world, or the manifestations of the world that are all around them, and within them. Something is then missing—call it connection, which ensouls the world—the aliveness that invites an anticipatory and participatory relationship with the world, and importantly, a world experienced as both profound Otherness, as well as deeply Oneness. The consequences for people and the world are profound—for the experience of alienation enables abstractions to flourish, exclusions to expand, and rushed interventions to proliferate—the ‘eclipse of relationality’ beckons.

Keywords

individuation; dialogue; self and other; phenomenological sensibility; ensouling the world

Introduction

The exquisite opening words of Wordsworth from *The Prelude*, Book III, ‘Residence at Cambridge’ (1896), state that,

To every natural form, rock, fruit, or flower,
Even the loose stones that cover the highway,
I gave a moral life: I saw them feel
Or linked them to some feeling: the great mass
Lay bedded in a quickening soul, and all
That I beheld respire with inward meaning.

Not so long ago, about to finish eleven years of full-time work at my then university workplace, I embarked on what was to be a last walk to the office. As part of that walk, while crossing a bridge, like in the poem, I experienced a heightened sense of alertness, aware that the daily rhythm of walking this well-loved pathway was about to come to an end. All the living beauty around me—the screeching cockatoos, the fast-moving murky *Maiwar* (First Nations name for the Brisbane River), the leaning paper-bark trees, the laugh of the kookaburra—struck me with renewed intensity. Yet I also noticed that the dozen or so people I walked past or alongside, were either on their phones talking to someone, or they had headphones on and were listening to something. The point was that they were giving no attention to what was unfolding around them. *They were elsewhere*. It was a far cry from a Wordsworth like-moment. I finished that final walk wondering, what does it mean for Nature to not be seen and what does it mean for each of us to not be seen by the other?

This story of crossing the river and the questions that arose within me, suggest that humanity has moved beyond what Martin Buber called the ‘eclipse

of God' (Friedman, 1991, p. 339), or what Nietzsche called 'the death of god', to a time that I have characterized as an 'eclipse of relationality' which is ultimately an undoing of intimacy and culture.

As such, the key wisdom from this article, the key theorizing of a way forward for practitioners concerned with healing culture—is that people increasingly spend so much of their life separated, apart, lacking intimacy with each other, or with the world, or the manifestations of the world that are all around them, and within them. Something is then missing—let us call it connection, which ensouls the world—the aliveness that invites an anticipatory, ethical and participatory relationship with the world, and more importantly, a world experienced as both profound Otherness (in its own aliveness and perceiving Us as Other), as well as deep Oneness. The consequences for people, culture, nature and the world are profound—for the experience of alienation enables abstractions to flourish, exclusions to expand, and rushed interventions to proliferate—the 'eclipse of relationality' beckons.

This will be explained further in the next section, but linking the idea of the eclipse of relationality with that final walk to work, if nature and other people are not seen, and people are not open to being seen by nature, then will they not suffer the consequences of our lack of intimacy?

The Eclipse of Relationality

Signposted as a world characterized by 'eclipse of relationality' above, many authors provide poignant analyses of the contemporary crises. For example, Otto Scharmer suggests that society faces a confluence of social-economic, ecological and cultural-spiritual crises (Scharmer, 2009, p. 95). Under such conditions political life has usurped the social-cultural and ecological life-worlds, rendering unbelievable violence towards people and ecosystems. There are huge shifts in the realm of culture (for example, increasing social isolation and a lack of intergenerational dialogue) and nature (for example, climate change) that are occurring simultaneously, causing many to lose any sense of orientation through the rapid changes and constant flux. The decay of democracy is underpinned by an unprecedented collusion between corporations and government, allowing and facilitating the manipulation of the masses through new form of 'surveillance capitalism' (Zuboff, 2019). The oceans are dying, and there is a proliferation of the death of many species. As the late Leonard Cohen would say, 'The catastrophe has taken place', 'the apocalypse has already occurred'.¹

Into such a catastrophe, there is a need not only for social, political and economic activism, but a new way of being in the world—an ontological shift—and a new way of perceiving and doing as social and ecological practice—a

¹ Cohen, L. see http://www.leonardcohen-prologues.com/closing_time.htm (Accessed 12.10.17).

phenomenological shift. These ontological and phenomenological shifts are offered as two pathways for practitioners concerned with what I call 'healing culture'. My audience are people who I like to think of as 'physicians of culture', an idea Hillman, in his dialogue with Shamdasani, suggests was Jung's. (Hillman & Shamdasani, 2013, p. 145). The first healing path is ontological—a new way of being that is experienced through a polarity between the ideas enfolded within Jung's theory of individuation and Buber's theory of dialogue, each of which are explored below. The second healing path is phenomenological—which I discuss as a new kind of reflective practice linked to a perception of living processes in the social and ecological fields. At the same time these two pathways are paved through two lines of thought.

The first line of thought highlights the crucial space between two poles—a polarity for living a conscious, creative, intimate and humanizing ontology. I suggest that this polarity can be discerned in the tension between the ideas of Jung's individuation work and Buber's dialogical work. I use the word polarity with a precision that means each of the poles needs to be deeply understood in and of its own right—individuation *and* dialogue (each with their corresponding difficulties), and yet with acknowledgment that each is enfolded in the other. Poles only make sense in their connected relationship: to be hungry only makes sense if someone can feel satiated; to go fast only has meaning when someone knows what it is to go slow. Importantly, polarity is used to eschew the cultural preference for balance—getting the balance right between one or the other, albeit recognizing indigenous worldviews that understand balance as being resonant and in relationship with the cosmic flux, thereby always in movement. However, polarity offers the idea of going deeply into both, knowing that within a journey of individuation is deep dialogue, and that within the journey of dialogue is deep individuation.

The second line of thought for cultural healers is traced from Carl Jung and James Hillman to Mary Watkins, Henri Bortoft and Allan Kaplan, and argues for a phenomenological way of perceiving the social and ecological world—or put in simpler language—a more intimate way of perceiving and doing in the world that would contribute to healing culture.

This was my concern on that final day of walking to my old workplace, aware that no one was seeing nature nor one another, nor aware that nature might be seeing us. Without that seeing, and awareness of being seen, there can be no intimacy and the eclipse of relationality draws near—a social and ecological atomization, fragmentation, or alienation. In contrast, this article offers a way to think about being receptive to an encounter with life. In the introductory story, to be in the encounter would be to allow the event of walking across *Maiwar* (the Brisbane River), *and* the relationship between myself and others who share the walk, and the river in itself, to manifest themselves as living processes. *Life then discloses itself*. Part of my argument is that the current way of being and doing in the world facilitates disconnection—and this disconnection is so profound and alienating that many people *do not see life, therefore life cannot disclose itself*. I

use the idea of ‘seeing’ broadly, in that many people do not sense, behold, experience, nor participate, in life. The current ontological gesture is largely dominated by mechanical, reductionist, distancing and deadening logics and practices—with the world observed and experienced in an increasingly abstract, separate, mediated and non-dynamic form. In this way of being and doing, the world and the ‘other’, cannot be loved, only acquired. It is this cultural gesture of acquisition, or what Buber called ‘rationality’ that is deadening (Buber, 1947) and is eclipsing relationality and ultimately life. An unloved world is easily ‘used’, viewed as a resource, and then exploited. Buber particularly argued that the world of abstraction and separation leads to an inevitable violence.

Carl Jung and Martin Buber: A 1951 Conflict of Individuation Versus Dialogical Ontologies

Readers might be asking, why the link between Martin Buber and Carl Jung? Tangential perhaps. Yet, linking the discussion to the deep cultural stories of individuation and dialogue grounds my argument in pre-existing reference points. Intriguingly, Buber became embroiled in a conflict with Jung, one manifest public in 1951. Contemporaries of a far-gone world, Buber disagreed with Jung, around some substantive issues. The 1951 conflict shocked people, because many people considered themselves as disciples of both men, who ostensibly shared a common concern with ‘modern man in search of a soul’ (Freidman 1991, p. 356). At the heart of the conflict was Buber’s stance on a dialogical worldview, in contrast to Jung’s predominant psychologizing one, or more accurately, one concerned with the Psyche—and particularly how the differences were interpreted to produce two divergent worldviews.

I would like to contend that on one level the conflict was simply a manifestation of misunderstanding one another (as often occurs when there is a conflict). However, on another level, it would be more useful to re-imagine their conflict as a necessity, enabling practitioners concerned with cultural healing to see a polarity that enables profound intimacy with both an enlarging Self, and also the Other. As such, it is suggested that we re-imagine an understanding of individuation and dialogue, not as an either-or prospect, *but as a dynamic polarity*, whereby both individuation and dialogue can be understood as deeply intertwined within one another, which in turns produces a different ontology of intimacy, or ‘way of being’—which is my key point. Let us start with Martin Buber’s understanding of dialogue.

Martin Buber and Dialogue

Within his *I-Thou* book (Buber, 1958) Buber argued that an ‘I-It’ orientation in the world represented rationalization, objectification and abstraction—treating nature, people, and God as an object *to be used*, and resource *to be appropriated and managed*, evident in the dominant discourses of human resources, natural resources, and so forth. In contrast to I-It, he posited the ‘I-Thou’ orientation in

the world, which represented a vibrant living encounter of person to nature, or person to person, or person to the form that the spirit of life is manifested within. In this, Buber understood the I-Thou as dialogical, bringing oneself completely into a situation, wholeheartedly, decisively even, yet with a complete openness to encounter the Other. In fact, *the I is made* in an encounter with the Thou.

For Buber, dialogue, or a dialogical attitude, becomes a crucial way of entering the world of the Other, of encountering the Other, such that identity is disrupted, and worldview is challenged. Dialogue becomes a way of life that ensures *constantly being open* to the perspectives of others or the Other, thereby never settling on an easy identity. This is significant, and I will return to it later.

Buber Misunderstanding Jung, But...

With his commitment to dialogue, Buber entered the 1951 critique of Jung, arguing that Jung's theory of individuation was colonized by what Buber called an I-It mode (Freidman, 1991, 357). Within this colonization, the world (the Other) is *used by the imagined Self*, which, for Buber, undermined an orientation of encounter with the Other, with 'the world'. In contrast, Buber argued,

Only then when, having become aware of the un-includable otherness of a being, I renounce all claims to incorporate it in any way within me or making it a part of my soul, does it truly become a Thou for me (cited in Freidman, 1991, p. 357).

My suggestion is that Buber's 'reading' of Jung was profoundly influenced by a deeply traumatic experience of Buber's early life. In this experience, which became seminal in his turn towards dialogue as a life-quest, Buber had been enthralled in a morning mystical experience. Unexpectedly, he was interrupted by a visiting young man who clearly had serious questions about life. Buber, still preoccupied with his personal spiritual morning quest, was not completely present to the young man. The young man left and days later killed himself. Buber, from that moment on, gave up a self-oriented mystical life, and reoriented his religious life as a deep presence to the Other—the other of people, nature and God. In suggesting that Buber's reading of Jung was shaped by this experience, I am also aware that there is plenty of evidence that Jung was fully *in dialogue* with 'the world' (see Sabini, 2002). Yet, there is also a potential warning wisdom in Buber's critique, hence the 'but...' at the end of this sub-heading. In an era of hyper-individualism there is a profound risk that Jung's theory of individuation will be appropriated by a self-oriented attitude.

Jung, Individuation and the Other

As suggested, I am not so sure Jung's understanding of being oriented towards the other was so different to Buber's, as is evidenced in Sabini's collection of Jung's writing on nature, *The Earth Has a Soul* (2002). But first, what is at the heart of Jung's theory of individuation? According to Jung's theory of

individuation, there is an autonomous process of accomplishing individual wholeness experienced as a psychological completeness. In orthodox Jungian thinking, it tends to be understood as a series of stages (Jung, 1955; 1972) that require significant effort to illuminate complexes, neurosis and the unconscious-at-play in our lives; courage enabling a person to move to responsible adulthood; and the obligation to 'find our own' path (Hollis, 93; 95), which includes service to the world. In some ways, the theory can be summed up by the first sentence of Jung's seminal *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, in which he states that, 'My life is a story of the self-realization of the unconscious' (1963, p. 3).

Importantly, Hillman, as will be discussed below, has rescued what he considers to be a narrowing of how the theory of individuation has been utilized within the analytical tradition. This is not to say that Jung had a narrow understanding, and again, drawing on his *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Jung clearly sees individuation as a process of a 'feeling of kinship', that is, of connecting with the world, not narrowing to a psychological internal process:

... what I now feel in advanced age... there is so much that fills me: plants, animals, clouds, day and night, and the eternal in man. The more uncertain I have felt about myself, the more there has grown a feeling of kinship with all things. In fact, it seems to me as if that alienation which so long separated me from the world has become transferred into my own inner world, and has revealed to me an unexpected unfamiliarity with myself (Jung 1963, p. 330).

Recent scholarship suggests that Jung, particularly in *The Red Book*, was going into the self to then offer something *to the world*—that 'kinship with all things' mentioned above; he constantly engaged the world in such a way that his self was disrupted and such that he could 'offer to the world' (Hillman & Shamdasani, 2013, p. 65). Importantly, here is the idea of the 'self being disrupted', echoing Buber's argument that dialogue necessitates an encounter with the Other that disrupts. Jung was particularly interested in dialogues with images that arose in the Psyche. As Hillman and Shamdasani put it, 'that allows the figures to work on us...He let them instruct him', and importantly, 'the relation shifts' (Hillman & Shamdasani, 2013, p. 165). Jung was not just interested in individuation as some introspective journey to discover a personal idiosyncratic self, or 'follow one's own journey' (Hillman & Shamdasani, 2013, p. 64). His quest for individuation was continually re-made or unmade by encounters with the world—that is, in dialogue with the world. Yet he failed, or so Hillman and Shamdasani suggest, to offer people a way of bringing what they discovered back into the world (Hillman & Shamdasani, 2013, p. 145). Because of that failure, most interpreters of Jung's theory of individuation focus on the inner journey for the purpose of the imagined Self, those earlier mentioned inner stages of consciousness.

What I am suggesting then is that with the risk of Jung's theory of individuation being appropriated within an 'I-It' attitude (individuation captured by individualism, introspection and rationality), instead we can imagine that

Buber and Jung each offer a deep understanding of either side of the polarity that I am proposing—individuation and dialogue—with each philosopher going more deeply into the one side, to discover the Other. Crucially, it is in the polarity into, and between both, that a new ontology of intimacy with both the Self and Other becomes possible, a new way of being in the world that is about ‘life and consciousness’, along with returning life and consciousness ‘to the world’ (Hillman & Shamdasani, 2013, p. 65). My sense is that this is crucial—a returning life and consciousness ‘to the world’, something akin to the introductory story (where people had no attentiveness to life and the world).

The Phenomenological Tradition

While the Jung and Buber conflict offers a way to re-imagine an ontology of intimacy, one grounded in a polarity between the ‘ideas’ of individuation and dialogue, the phenomenological tradition offers a second path, one which can tap into a different way of perceiving and relating to the world. I say this, noting that Buber and Jung were also steeped in phenomenology, which is what joins all the authors examined in this article.

A particular tracing of some of this tradition is now discussed, one which foregrounds the possibility of a new practice of intimacy in the social and ecological fields, and which can ultimately contribute to a healing of culture. Four key authors are traced, from James Hillman to Mary Watkins, then Henri Bortoft and Allan Kaplan.

Hillman and ‘Ensouling The World’

James Hillman, one of the key inheritors of Jung’s work, draws deeply on the phenomenological tradition, and gifts us with a deep exploration of ‘ensouling the world’. Hillman initiated a revival of what he understood to be a broader and deeper view of ‘soul in the world’, first in his seminal book *Re-Visioning Psychology* (Hillman, 1975), and then in his essay, ‘Anima Mundi: The Return of the Soul to the World’ (Hillman, 1992b). For Hillman, somewhat like Buber, Jung’s notion of the soul, linked to his theory of individuation, had been captured by an ever-increasingly narrow psychology, which over-emphasized a turn inwards. Hillman was rescuing or unearthing the deeper and broader perspective of Jung’s theory of individuation. In a nutshell, the argument is that not only are people alive, animated by the life-force or soul’s ‘acorn’ (Hillman, 1999), but so is the world, the cosmos. Hillman called this ‘ensouling’ the world (Hillman, 1992b). Ensouling relocates the soul outside of narrow perspectives of psychology that sees life as only an inner-oriented subjective and psychologizing process of the Self. He wanted his phenomenological depth psychology to engage more with the world—to equip people to see the ‘images in events that give rise to meaningfulness, value and a full range of experiences’ (Hillman, 1989, p. 15) and that are mostly entangled within culture. Ensouling the world leads *away from* any perspective that drifts towards a focus on individuation as predominantly an

internal process to make meaning for the Self. Instead, ensouling the world insists on recognizing that the world is both alive to its own healing, as well as humans bringing meaning and healing *to the world*, particularly to culture, again alluding to Hillman and Shamdasani's suggestion that Jung was a 'physician of culture' (Hillman & Shamdasani, 2013, p. 145).

Importantly, a perspective of ensouling the world starts to see soul outside of the solo self, and re-orient towards the profoundly different and alive Other—whether that is the Other of the unconscious, nature, the world of politics, economics, urban planning and so forth. Here, there is a way forward in thwarting, or reversing, the eclipse of relationality. A deadening world can be filled with fertile life again.

Watkins—Towards a Phenomenology of the Social

Drawing on Hillman's work, a significant contribution is also made by one of the authors of *Towards Psychologies of Liberation* (Watkins & Shulman, 2008), Mary Watkins, from Pacifica College, California. She also wrote the influential essay 'Breaking the Vessels: Archetypal Psychology and the Restoration of Culture, Community, and Ecology' (Watkins, 2008).

She explicitly introduces Hillman's 'soul of the world' into the social field, asking people working in the social sphere to *refrain from quick intervention*, and enter into a much longer process of observation, listening and imaginative participation in the social phenomenon that they want to intervene into. I should add that this invitation eschews the mad addiction to rapid solution seeking that is self-evident in the social field. Instead, a stance of learning is a necessity, to see more 'deeply' into the causes of our social catastrophes. She invites people to listen to more people connected to whatever social issue is being explored, whether it is a local social problem (homelessness, drugs) or a socio-creative challenge (such as urban design). In that listening, she insists on more dialogue and then the waiting, likened to discerning the 'soul of the world', for images to arise that offer deeper meaning, and deeper diagnostics about a way forward. Such listening for images also recognizes that it is the heart that can be an 'organ of perception' and sees the world in aesthetic ways (Hillman, 1992a). In a sense, Watkins and Hillman are suggesting that the listening, presencing and dialogue, enables someone to potentially *get inside* what a social phenomenon is suggesting, the gesture that is unfolding. In some ways I imagine her work, like Hillman's thinking, as psychologizing the social, 'discovering the soul within it [the social]' (Hillman, 1999).

Mary Watkins has developed a useful framework for thinking about how people engage the social world in a soul-oriented aesthetic way, which includes practices such as:

- '*Notitia*'—a term of Hillman's that pushes people to notice, and keep looking, listening, and noticing, but then doing it more with all their senses, with the importance of prioritizing sensing

over 'feeling'. I quote here, that the noticing needs 'the gift of careful attention that is sustained, patient, subtly attuned to images and metaphors...' (Watkins, 2008, p. 6);

- 'Multiplicity and dialogue'—recognizing that the soul wants multiplicity and complexity, and so there is a need to 'bracket' the 'domineering ego' (albeit, almost impossible) and listen to the un-listened and silenced voices (in the social field this is the equivalent of finding invisible people who rarely have their voice heard on an issue). Listening to such voices also requires a capacity for dialogue;
- 'Seeing through' and 'the imaginal'— which for Watkins represents Hillman's warning, that 'we are always in the embrace of an idea' (Watkins, 2008, p. 6). The point is that ideas are often abstractions, or quick leaps to interpretation and judgement. Aligned to the manic addiction to rapid solution finding, fueled by a gesture of control—quick interpretations and judgements undermine a gesture of humility and learning (and unlearning) which requires a deeper quest for understanding. As a contrast, seeing 'the imaginal' requires social practitioners to attend to the images of the world as presented through stories and dialogue, therefore letting go of pre-determined fantasies. Of course, many presenting images or stories are not necessarily welcome as they might penetrate to the heart of our cultural darkness's—addictions to efficiency, convenience, hyper-consumption so name just a few;
- 'Reflection and action'—here are spaces of real research, being in the world in action, yet reflecting on that action rigorously. Both reflection and action, as embodied activities, can enable what Paulo Freire richly called 'praxis' (Freire, 1970). Watkins is pushing for a depth here, asking for a combination of this Freirean action and reflection, with a Hillman-like 'love and observation'.

What does such a framework mean in practice? Take the following example: I used to sit almost daily in my old local shopping village. I'd often walk the 100 meters from my home and settle in for a coffee. It is a semi-circle of shops—bakers, bottle-shop, butcher, fruit and vegetable store, sushi, a gorgeous Thai restaurant and a few others. It's a quick stroll to the train station. It could be perfect. But I'd sit there observing, sometimes in conversation with others, and reach for a seeing of this social phenomenon of the village, one representing the gesture of our social-body. And of course, it was hard not to see what was unfolding. At the center of these shops is a car park. It is a chaotic space of cars moving in and out, around, and through. Those of us sitting around this center get to breathe the fumes and struggle to converse over the noise of machines. It

is tough going to be in this village if you desire conviviality! The gesture is clear—a place of efficient commerce, designed for cars, quick shopping and meagre human exchange, perhaps indicative of a broken culture, colonized by capitalist logics. That is simply what it is, without fantasy. It is quite shocking to see—and hence often avoided at all costs—both an intimate encounter with the social phenomenon of the village, and also a true diagnosis of the social priorities.

In this perception of the heart, an aesthetic response, I also experience a yearning when I sit in the shopping village. I yearn for something like an Italian or Spanish piazza. I long for their equivalent beauty and imagine what such a center could induce from local residents, to have a real ‘center,’ a hearth honoring the mythological Hestia figure in our collective culture (Paris, 2017, p. 185–187). Such honoring would be healing, fostering a warmth in our culture that is fractured by too much Hermes energy, mythically caught in exchange, movement and efficiency.

In seeing this village in a new fresh way, drawing on Hillman and Watkins suggestions, phenomenologically, through noticing and through allowing images to arise, implies a seeing through senses, aesthetically, which moves towards a possible encounter of intimacy. Here is a glimpse back into what a Hestia-like return to life might look like, instead of the deadening logics of much urban design today.

But now let us continue on this pathway, from Hillman and Watkins through to Henri Bortoft and Allan Kaplan, which extend into the broader ecological and social field.

Henri Bortoft: Towards a Phenomenology of the Ecological World

Henri Bortoft, a teacher at Schumacher College until he passed away some years ago, was deeply influenced by many traces of thought, including Hillman’s phenomenological and poetic work, but also Goethe’s scientific endeavors. Bortoft particularly explored how the Goethean and phenomenological way of thinking profoundly disrupts the old Cartesian way of separating, reducing, and deadening (Bortoft, 2012). He was doing much the same *for science* as what Jung and then Hillman were doing *for psychology*. He focused on awakening faculties of seeing for scientists that would enable them *to see ecological processes as living processes* in contrast to seeing them as mechanical, dead, and linear ones. This required both seeing with a rigorous observation of the parts, and the whole, but also an imaginative, or poetic process, of *seeing life unfold* within the phenomenon being observed. Such scientific practice therefore takes rigorous observation of the phenomenon seriously but adds imagination to see connections, patterns, and movement. For both Goethe and Wittgenstein, the kind of seeing which sees connections is imagination (Kaplan, 2002, p. 28). It is about the use of imagination because life always includes movement (even if only at the molecular level) and people need imaginative faculties to see and sense movement. Goethe called the use of both rigorous observation *and* imagination as

'delicate empiricism' (Goethe, 1790/2009) or 'exact sensory imagination' (Goethe, 1790/2009, p. xxviii).

For example, when people observe a tree, they usually see a 'thing', appearing relatively stable and static (this is the normative Cartesian way). Traditional science would dissect a tree to see each part: roots, trunk, branches, and leaves. However, within Goethean and phenomenological approaches, with close observation of the parts and whole, over a period of time, it is posited that with imaginative work, it is possible *to see a tree as a living process*, both in itself, and also deeply connected to the web of life embracing it. As such we can perceive a tree as both a 'thing' (what Goethe called 'object thinking') and a 'process' or 'emergent phenomenon' (what Goethe called 'metamorphic thinking').

In the same way, when inviting my community development students to understand this kind of living or metamorphic thinking and they struggle to get this idea of a tree as a living process, I often ask them to think about whether a rainbow exists. Does a rainbow exist? In one sense it does, as an idea or an image. Yet it is not easy to perceive as a thing (object thinking)—it, as a thing, will never be found. Yet it does exist as an emergent phenomenon, which manifests under certain conditions (rain, particular light, language, memory and so forth) (Barfield, 1988, p. 15). As such, all of life can be understood in this way. In turn, I try to teach my students to let go of thinking about community as a thing (again, object thinking), but to instead understand it, and therefore also notice it, as an emergent phenomenon, a living process, made by the people creating it. This approach to perceiving re-orientes community from noun to verb (Burkett, 2001) in much the same way that Hillman tried to reorient an understanding of the self as a thing, instead suggesting self to be re-imagined as a process always in dialogue with context.

Kaplan: Towards a Phenomenological Social and Ecological Practice

Kaplan has taken the implications of Bortoft's work, both the phenomenological and Goethean strands of it, to articulate a living *social and ecological* practice. Best articulated in his ground-breaking book *Artists of the Invisible* (2002), and then *A Delicate Activism* (Kaplan & Davidoff, 2014), Kaplan invites people to apply the metamorphic way of thinking explained above within the social field, asking questions such as what it means to see groups, communities and organizations in this living way? His work suggests a way of being present to this kind of seeing via Goethe's 'delicate empiricism', that requires the deft work of both rigorous observation (of the phenomenon, material, social or ecological) and active imagination—to see both the movement within living social processes and also the formative forces creating each unique social group—usually manifest as culture. Exercises are used to awaken the practice 'muscle' of seeing, sensing and imagining. For example, here is a personal story that might help to understand what Kaplan is trying to support about a living phenomenological way. The story, while focusing on the ecological world, is also relevant for perceiving the social field in a similar way.

The story comes from a five-day conversation that I participated in at a property called Towerland, 400km east of Cape Town, in South Africa. The conversation was between twenty-six practitioners from around the world reflecting on the question, 'Can a social practice that foregrounds observation contribute to healing in the world?' Sitting behind the question was an awareness that the world is at work in polarities, as is people's everyday practice. One key polarity is intervention-observation. And of course, in most people's every-day practice there is an easy disposition towards the intervention end. People love to take action. We are not very good at observing.

Within the exploration of the question about foregrounding observation, and in our attempts to pause and learn how to see, one of the exercises the facilitators Allan Kaplan and Sue Davidoff invited us all to do was, to spend an hour each day in groups of three, observing a particular natural phenomenon. My group chose to observe the succulents that covered much of a garden bed that I had walked past dozens of times over the past few years.

As I observed, and as the group of three entered into dialogue about what we were observing, what struck me were a number of things. First, the awareness of my blindness in seeing—I saw so little—or more accurately I thought I had seen, and then as dialogue opened up, I realized how many different ways there were to see. That awareness of blindness humbled me at a profound level. How much do I not see of the world, or myself, or of ecological or social situations I am immersed within? Second, the daily exercise of sensing and conversation with the other two in my group gradually awakened within me an intimacy with this garden that I had walked past so many times. Previously I had hardly noticed this garden—it was dead in my world, it did not feature in my imaginative world, other than in the abstract (as a 'garden' I simply passed by). I posit that maybe, just maybe, if someone had destroyed the garden I might not have even noticed, or if I had noticed maybe I would not have protested—after-all, it was 'just' a succulent garden not a rainforest! But now, having observed at a detailed level, having sensed the parts and the whole, I had cultivated an intimate relationship with that garden—I care about it; I can see it now if I do some memory work. I could almost, but not quite, draw it. This seeing/sensing and this intimacy then opens up a new participatory relationship between me and the garden, myself and the world; a succulent garden as Other, as disrupting me, inviting me to see it, disclosing itself as I give it intention and attention.

It is a relationship that is founded or grounded in a sense of the whole (not seen only by stepping back and getting an overview—although this need to 'step back' is partly true, but by first 'stepping in' and getting close to the parts, and in being intimate with sensing the parts, and the relationships and patterns connecting the parts, allowing the whole *to be revealed*, the gestalt)—and this whole is then experienced sensuously and intuitively.

And so here we return to the key wisdom that I am hinting at as the crux of this article—my theorizing of a way forward for cultural healing. My glimpse, or this awareness of my previous alienation from the garden—much like the people

walking across the bridge in the Introductory story—draws me into an awareness that I spend so much of my life separated, literally apart, lacking intimacy with another, or with the world, or the manifestations of the world that are all around me, and within me. As suggested in the Introduction, something is then missing—call it connection, which ensouls the world—the aliveness that invites an anticipatory and participatory relationship. The consequences for me and the world are profound—for the experience of alienation enables abstractions to flourish, exclusions to expand, extraction to abound, and rushed interventions to proliferate—the ‘eclipse of relationality’ beckons.

In Conclusion: Returning to Jung and Buber

To reverse the eclipse of relationality is to then engage in both an ontological turn and a phenomenological practice within which ‘life discloses itself’. It is a stance of open humble learning; not solution seeking, instrumental, willful. This is a key shift in everyday practice—a cultural shift, one that I propose can bring cultural healing.

Linking to the first part of this article, such a phenomenological practice can also be integrated with a new ontology, one which connects the ideas of Jung’s individuation with Buber’s dialogue in a relationship of polarity. Such polarity enables intimacy with Self and the Other, which are deeply enfolded within one another.

Within Buber’s idea of I-Thou, there was always the need of a full expansive, conscious ‘I’, capable of stepping into the presence of an Other. To not attend to Self, and in particular, the depths of self/s, is to be thwarted in any attempt to meet the Other. And one of Jung’s great contributions to life has been opening up this encounter with the many layers of the Self that is an on-going dialogue of ‘self-ing’ (self as verb), but with a much broader view, likened to Hillman’s rescuing of ‘soul of the world’. This dance between the Self-ing journey and the Other, is a living daily practice that requires people to sense and live the polarity of the Self-Other relation. They are different and yet enfolded within one another.

Could it be that Jung and Buber’s 1951 conflict was simply the soul of the world trying to reveal the dual journeys of dialogue within self, and then into the world, so we could see both journeys clearly

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Peer-Reviewed Article

Embodying Experiential Learning:

Cultivating Inner Peace in Higher Education

Vivianna Rodriguez Carreon

University of Sydney

vivianna.rodriguezcarreron@sydney.edu.au

Penny Vozniak

University of Sydney

penn@pennyvoznik.com

Abstract

This paper presents a reflection on experiential teaching and an experiment in embodied learning for peacebuilders and changemakers. The theories, practices and experiments are part of a postgraduate course in Peace of Mind, offered at the University of Sydney. The intention of this course is to invite the reader to see experiential learning and awareness-based practices as tools that enable the possibility to evolve our humanness. Interdisciplinary abstract methodologies from Indigenous and phenomenological philosophies support the argument that granular and qualitative knowledge emerges through the embodiment of human expression. It addresses the concept of fragmentation of the self, the importance of pausing and giving voice to knowledge that words cannot convey. Through the arts, the paper shows non-linear forms of communication with visual experiments. The purpose of this collaborative work is in the craft, the process, and beyond the authorship.

Keywords

experiential learning, Indigenous wisdom, consciousness, social arts, embodiment, inner peace, peace of mind, higher education.

Introduction

How do you teach and assess learning which does not rely only on cognitive, intellectual knowledge but also experiential and embodied experience? This paper presents a process in experiential teaching and an experiment in embodied learning in which enabling and embracing different types of human expression in higher education was both encouraged and accepted. This experiment came about as part of the opportunity to redesign the postgraduate unit of study *Peace of Mind: The Psychology of Peace*, a core unit of the Master of Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Sydney, Australia.¹ Peace builders and changemakers who work in development and security, choose peace and conflict studies for its interdisciplinary approach. Is epistemological analysis based on disciplinary theories enough to understand the implications of reproducing the development, peace, and security that we want to see globally? The authors of this article believe it is not. This paper argues that students who learn only through cognitive and linear reasoning will not be equipped to solve complex structural conflicts. Peace and conflict, along with peace and security, conflict transformation and conflict resolution studies will need to include abstract concepts to work with the inner self through experiential and embodied learning.

The quality of outcomes for people depends on the inner place from which they operate (Scharmer, 2016). Merleau-Ponty suggests that coherence originates from the inner experience (2014, p. 58). But “what do we know about that inner place?” (Scharmer, 2016, pp. 27–28). The intention to redesign the course departed from the premise that to know ontological peace and security—an inner sense of feeling peace and safety—requires experiential learning to experiment with the granular quality of emotions. Theory U, an awareness-based systems approach that “makes a system *sense* and *see* itself” (Scharmer, 2018, p. 17), was used for the redesign of the course in order to discern qualitative knowledge. As humans evolved, new technologies offered greater power; but as power grew, wisdom was left behind (Senge, et al. 2004, p. 187). If we are to embody a new perspective on peace and security, this paper argues that it is necessary to incorporate experiential awareness-based practices and dive deeply into both philosophical and phenomenological approaches on experiential consciousness. Inspired by abstract methodologies from Indigenous wisdom and phenomenological philosophies, the course was redesigned to better understand

¹ The possibility to redesign Peace of Mind: The Psychology of Peace emerged from a project led by Wendy Lambourne with Vivianna Rodriguez Carreon focused on curriculum transformation intended to enhance collaborative and interactive learning associated with an authentic assessment.

how self-expression through the social arts can contribute to a more holistic and coherent understanding of peace.

This paper is a collaborative work. It is based both on Vivianna Rodriguez Carreon's input, when she was invited as the new teacher and co-coordinator for the course taught during the first semester in 2020, and a reflection on the course content and assessment experiment from a student, Penny Vozniak. The Peace and Conflict Studies program attracts students who aim to work with vulnerable people in the context of direct or structural violence. Initially, the unit of study had two different groups, face-to-face and online classes. But after four weeks, like many others, the country went into lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and the rest of the semester was delivered online for both groups. At this time, holding a safe space felt essential while engaging with complex topics that were part of the curriculum. Rodriguez Carreon and Carrillo acknowledge that when applying awareness-based practices it is critical to bring "responsibility to hold the space and enable difficult conversations" (2021, p. 125). Students were encouraged to reflect on their lived experiences through awareness-based practices in order to connect with the meaning of inner and outer peace.

The Unit of Study curriculum was divided into twelve teaching modules and two workshops.² This paper aims not to analyze in detail the course structure, but rather to focus on the content and approaches that the two authors experienced in teaching and learning. The redesign of this course was aligned with the University's learning, teaching, research and engagement programs to support cultural competence education by including interdisciplinarity and Indigenous knowledge. One of the assignments relied on abstract methodologies; it was the results of this new kind of assessment task that inspired this paper. The assessment invited students to reflect on their understanding of *peace of mind*. They were encouraged to explore alternative media or formats in addition to, or instead of the written 'essay' format where a formal reference list or bibliography was not required.

However, they were required to indicate the sources of inspiration beyond the traditional scholarly literature. They were encouraged to see, sense and feel its meaning. The invitation to express through different literacies was an experimental epistemology, an exploration of the meaning of peace by thinking through processes and lived experiences in order to experiment with *invisible* body manifestations. The assessment was not a judgment of the students' experience, but an exploration of the process. They were welcome to choose photography, scribing, painting, poetry, music, video, text, or *whatever way they*

² Vivianna as co-coordinator was responsible for redesigning and delivering six out of the twelve modules, and one workshop. Vivianna acknowledges the contribution of co-coordinator, Wendy Lambourne who was responsible for teaching and delivering the other modules and the second workshop.

*expressed themselves best.*³ Fast forward a year later, and inspired by the students' responses, Penny was invited to collaborate with this paper. Her reflection stood out for her experimental, arts-based approach to embodying the concept of inner peace, and the philosophies and literature that inspired her work, intrinsically related with the redesigned course content.⁴ Those same philosophies were the inspiration for Vivianna's redesign; to introduce phenomenological theories called abstract methodologies. In Penny's voice:

I wanted to find a way to give a human shape to the relationship between inner and outer peace, and to test out some of the more abstract concepts in the course. If emotions, thoughts, and sense perceptions were expressed as sounds and images instead of words, and then mapped back onto the body, would this new perspective change how I perceived and embodied these phenomena?

Providing the permission to introspect on internal processes and encouraging a different language of expression, enabled students to access and embody deep knowledge that cannot be expressed in words.

An Ontological Invitation to the Reader

The inspiration to teach inner knowing came from different disciplines, particularly phenomenology. Phenomenology in this sense is not a mental or physical view, but a unity between body and mind (Varela et al., 1993, p. 29). Indigenous knowledge also provided inspiration, "it must be close to impossible for indigenous cultures to convey their knowledge to us literates because we ask for it in the way we would write it down, in neat linear sequences. That is not how they know their stories." (Kelly, 2016, location No. 847). How do we know and relate to our own story? Decolonizing academic experiential methodology required a possibility to open new ways to conveying self-knowledge.

Inspired by these unconventional approaches, this paper embraces non-linear processes, whilst acknowledging resistance to non-linear expression in academia. The aim is to reproduce the unconventional course style in the paper

³ Although the results were remarkable, the coordinators noticed the risk taken by students to express creativity within the academic setting. This prompted us to question the limitations of educators to co-evolve for creativity in higher education when the possibility to create and innovate was not essential on the students' educational journey within a structural hierarchical institutional context (from high school to undergraduates).

⁴ Since this was not a research study with ethical approval to extract data from students' work and results, we cannot provide here an analysis of the range of works that emerged from the assessment. Instead, we tailored a narrative between teacher and student from their experience and relationship with content and assessment.

presentation. For example, the reader will notice that Penny's reflection uses the first-person voice. Also, the results of her experimental assessment draw from a combination of literacies, namely sound and visual. The presentation of this paper and its methods may trigger linear methodologists. We invite the reader to pause and witness the potential of *non-linear forms of expression in the educational environment*, as well as the paper's unconventional "structure".

Why? Because we want to take a step forward from "knowledge' in an analytical way" (Aikenhead & Mitchell, 2011, p. 69; Goodchild, 2021, p. 79) towards a "sense of collective historical subjectivity and agency and our 'embodied' accounts of the truth" (Haraway, 1988, p. 579) through different literacies.

Fragmentation of the Self

Using psychosocial, psychological, and philosophical approaches, the course presented the concept of self-fragmentation in lived experience. A key part of the course syllabus was learning how to deal with collectives that had conflicted past experiences, in other words, trauma. As trauma fragments, "incoherence" emerges and fractures the relations to the self (Hübl, 2020, p. 32). For Gabor Mate, it is the "unprocessed experience" where the self is disconnected from the self (2021). A traumatic event overloads the organic way of being, and consequently the expression of 'what happened' is not coherent in writing or speaking. Herman's unspeakable truth continues in this vein, stating that "the ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness. Certain violations of the social compact are too terrible to utter aloud: this is the meaning of the word *unspeakable*" (Herman, 1997, p. 1). But what is consciousness, and why is consciousness studies literature not found in interdisciplinary courses that prepare peacebuilders and changemakers, who in many cases will decide for those who have experienced the unspeakable? Consciousness arises from living the phenomenon, not analyzing meaning. It is a process of restoring the presence "of myself to myself" (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, p. 16).

Presencing enhances sensing, just as sensing enhances seeing. Sensing extends seeing by moving our locus of attention "inside" a phenomenon. Presencing enlarges the activity of sensing by using our Self as a vehicle for deepening our sensing. The root of the word presencing is *es, which means "to be." (Scharmer, 2016, p. 164)

It is possible to say then that experiencing trauma fragments *the self and the self* and feeling presence restores *the self and the self*, as Figure 1 explains:

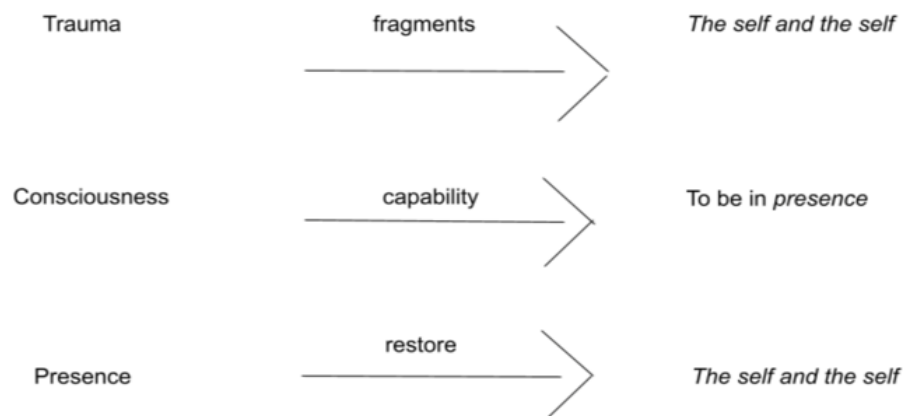


Figure 1: Relationship between Trauma, Consciousness and Presence
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Drawing inspiration from Krishnamurti's (1969) view of fragmentation as the origin of conflict, or consciousness divided, one of the course modules focused on *fragmentation*. At the same time, awareness became a tool to notice emotions that emerge when experiencing fragmentation. Trauma means fragmentation (Hübl, 2020). To understand the concept of *fragmented experience*, we need to know how peace of mind can be compromised. The central concept is that trauma is a broken experience (Van der Kolk, 2014; Mate, 2021; Herman, 1997), a disconnected expression of the self from the self.

The process of teaching and assessing was aligned to the session's topic and the way of teaching. Through an experiential learning activity, students were invited to sense the meaning of fragmented memory. A post-it note exercise was used to reflect on the meaning of fragmentation. This activity adapted from Rebecca Campbell's "Memories as Post-It Notes" (2014) analogy explains, when victims experience a traumatic event, it is like having the story written into separate post-it notes rather than one whole piece of paper. Each student narrated a random, short but real story in class, with each sentence split into several post-it notes, one after another. Then they spread out the post-it notes. Once the post-it notes are isolated, Campbell's analogy is amplified by challenging the audience to put together the post-it notes—now in several places—and at the same time imagine an environment of pressure, hierarchy and evaluation to reflect what is felt right after a traumatic experience. By breaking a coherent story⁵ into isolated words or phrases, students represent the fragmentation of the experience. Isolated words or sentences do not make sense. Through the experiential learning exercise, students were able to perceive how victim-survivors' peace of mind can get compromised through sensing

⁵ The story they were invited to write was not related to a trauma. It was suggested to write something they did the day before, but something that happened.

fragmentation, and at the same time, reflect on why victim-survivors are called to narrate their traumatic stories after decades of silence as a coherent expression. The self divides as the emotions emerging from the event are rejected. In exchange, Van der Kolk says that in a safe environment “normal memory integrates the elements of each experience into the continuous flow of self-experience by a complex process of association” (2014, p. 180).

A core reading on Fragmentation was Kristeva’s “Approaching Abjection”. The abject blurs the boundaries between the self with the self. It is the inner turmoil where meaning collapses, and the super ego emerges. Where the “repugnance” of the self-separates and forms the abject through objectivization of the Other. It is the denial of the self, the notion of repression, and the split between the “I” and the “Other” (Kristeva, 1982, pp. 2–3). It is also the emotional response to the rejection of the self, a breakdown in the distinction between what is self and what is Other. The reading caused discomfort among the students.

At the beginning of the semester when I was introduced to this theory, I rejected it. Kristeva paints an unnerving vision that is difficult to contemplate, let alone integrate. Despite my initial aversion, I was repeatedly drawn back to the abject. Fear soon gave way to curiosity for the unspeakable.⁶

David Bohm explored the fragmentation phenomenon through the lens of theoretical physics and concluded that separation was at the root of the current crises faced by humanity. This psychological division into Self and Other has been called “a wrong turn” in human evolution (Krishnamurti, 1980). Believing that they were different and separate, humans sought to control and exploit Nature. Perhaps more dangerously, the accepted *human against nature*⁷ narrative created a blind spot that made it difficult to recognize the role humans play in the destruction of the planet. In search for inspiration on cultures where humans and Nature are one, one of the modules was dedicated to Indigenous knowledges.

Indigenous Knowledge

University courses in Social Sciences have normalized literacy as the preferred mode of academic expression; “literate” has become synonymous with being “educated”. Astonishingly, memory systems and encoded ways of communication in Indigenous languages were “allowed to fade from western education” (Kelly,

⁶ This was Penny’s comment regarding Kristeva’s reading.

⁷ We updated the age-old “man against nature” narrative to “human against nature”, because it is situated in the contemporary context, and because narratives are not static, they are meant to evolve.

2016, Location No. 831). Yunkaporta argues that “a focus on linear, abstract, declarative knowledge alone not only fails to create complex connectivity but damages the mind” (2019, p. 112). In Peru, according to The Guardian, Quispe Collantes made history by being the first doctoral student to defend a thesis in Indigenous oral language, Quechua (Collyns, 2019). However, it was also presented in writing irrespective of the fact that in oral languages some words are difficult to capture the meaning of, as they include several movements and embodiments in context. For Yunkaporta (2019), the difference between oral and ‘print-based’ cultures is the context. While orality links patterns and symbols, and depends on the field space, ‘print-based’ is defined through designing and itemizing in isolation. The cognitive analysis is in conceptualizing an idea into a word as a way of representing meaning. Kelly’s research also shows that landscapes were crucial in forming memory and creating knowledge across Indigenous cultures worldwide (2016). Capabilities on sensing the world and expressing its understanding in other ways that are as equally legible, valuable and recognized as ‘print-based’ hasn’t advanced simultaneously in higher education.

Colonialism alienated oral cultures and bestowed a sense of superiority to those able to read and write words, whilst denouncing other ways of being and other forms of symbolizing language as inferior ways to sense and to communicate. Indigenous cultures across the world were repressed in their ways of expression. This resulted in oral languages for centuries choosing sketches, drawing in codes, and relying on mnemonic technologies of memory such as textiles, out of the possibility to be equally valued to evolve for educational learning. The standardization in conceptualizing through writing as a linear method for teaching, learning and assessing has resulted in a hierarchy of human expression, and with that *power*. In education, writing rules was prioritized over phonetics. Yet, as Kelly points out, for most of human history, there was no writing (2016, Location No. 606), and whenever Indigenous knowledge was usurped and replicated in literature, many qualities of knowledge were lost (Kelly, 2016; Yunkaporta, 2019). Weave is an action of creation in several languages, like in Latin text means *texere* which is to “weave” (Chacon, 2020, p. 49), therefore for many early cultures an act of weaving was an act of conceiving knowledge. In this way, as Chacon states, “the words transform into designs” (2020, p. 59). In Australian songlines, Elders “sing their list of locations, visualizing them in memory and recalling the information associated with each place” (Kelly, 2016, Location No. 604).

A person of ‘high degree’ in traditional knowledge may find a song in a dream if they are profoundly connected to land, lore, spirit and community. But that song must then be taken up by the people and modified gradually through many iterations before it becomes part of the culture. Besides, that song can only be found through a ritual process developed over millennia by that community. The song itself is not as important as the communal knowledge process that produces it (Yunkaporta, 2019, p. 71).

Yunkaporta's quote inspires us to focus on process and show us how culture forms and transforms through iterations. When people collectively do the same thing over an extended period of time, it becomes embodied, it creates a sense of belonging, it creates Culture (Menakem, 2017, p. 251). Culture is not static. Influenced and constructed socially and politically, it is evolutive, and for this reason it can also be innovative. For Tyson, cultural innovation needs a profound connection with the land and the people for the patterns of creations being visualized (Yunkaporta, 2019, p. 71). For Indigenous people, the interdependence of human and Nature has never been in doubt. This is because "Indigenous means from place"⁸ (Perez-Barron, 2021). "I can read the bush"⁹, said Australian Aboriginal Elder Miriam Rose Ungunmerr (2017b) from the Daly River. The land is what they are, an extension of their body (Atkinson, 2002, p. 34). When Indigenous voices are heard at the United Nations and global environment forums, they are speaking on behalf of Nature. This alien worldview seeks to remind us that interconnectivity is the natural state of all human beings, not just an abstract concept.

Listening to *Pause*

How do we construct an innovative response to the continued violence perpetrated across all levels in a *complex system* interacting with multiple stakeholders (Lederach, 2005)? By listening to *Pause*.¹⁰

In pausing, we invite the reader to be a participant on the experiential component embedded in the three key elements used in Theory U to *open the mind, open the heart* and *open the will* (Scharmer, 2018, p. 25)—to risk. One of the first experiential activities that pre-established the way groups interact was the four listening levels of Theory U. Scharmer considers listening to be our most underrated skill. Students watched the video of 4 levels of listening: "downloading" (reconfirming what we know), "factual" (what is different than what we know), "empathic" (allows us to connect with the experience of the other), and "generative" (connects us with who we are and whom we want to be) (Scharmer, 2015; Scharmer, 2018, pp. 93–94). Then, students did a group exercise to notice in which moment what level they were listening from—downloading, factual, empathic, or generative. The dynamic was to discuss one of

⁸ Gina Perez-Barron in conversation with Gabor Mate at the online The Wisdom of Trauma - Expert Speaker Series. June 8-14, 2021.

⁹ Miriam Ungunmerr said this during The Art of Meditation and Dadirri talk in Sydney, 2017.

¹⁰ While not each module represents each of the subtitles in this paper. The modules focused on the topics explained in this paper. As well, different awareness-based practices, including listening, were embedded across Vivianna's modules.

the questions they usually prepare for the class.¹¹ The main idea was that when one group member spoke, the others were listening and trying to see from which listening level they were operating. For example, in groups of three people, each student listened for three minutes, followed by one minute of silence, then the next person spoke for three minutes, and so on. The key was to *pause*. In that minute before it was the next person's turn to talk is when the magic happened. While anecdotal, some of the feedback was that they felt uncomfortable at first, particularly during the minute of silence. During the minute, they also realized that prior to the exercise, they tended to jump into response mode, without paying attention to what the other person had said. The minute allowed them to pause and to notice from which level of listening they were operating from and to be in presence. After that, it was easier to remind students to apply listening skills when doing group work without further specific guidance or the need to do a minute of silence.

Another way of pausing is exercising mindfulness. During the course, we drew from different sources to contemplate and understand awareness. *Dadirri*, is to listen deeply and connect, said Aboriginal Elder Miriam Rose Ungunmerr (2017a). It means contemplation and it is a way of life. It is about living versus conceptualizing what it means cognitively. Those descriptions, however, do not translate the lived experience of imagination. Judy Atkinson put into words that *Dadirri* gathers information in quiet observation and deep listening, building knowledge through awareness and contemplation or reflection, which informs action (2002, p. 18). In *Dadirri*, learning is an embodied experience, Ungunmerr (1988, p. 2) reminds us that listening and waiting are key, but also enable us to act.

It was challenging to redesign the course with new resources from literature that are often perceived as meta-philosophy or mystical, and to include additional resources that were not literate. For this, the assessment also needed to open the space for other ways of communication and other ways of knowing—as a basis for the expression to be accepted. Social Science in Universities have predominantly praised the essay. Yet, to answer the assessment on their personal perspective on the meaning of 'peace of mind' requires, as Mueller put it, "being human" (2017, p. 25); being in presence (Scharmer, 2018); and in space-time relation (Hübl, 2020). Trying out a non-linear assessment method added an experiential experiment: to trust the students. It was an opportunity to experiment with an authentic way of being, doing and sensing. In her reflection video, Penny explores how some of the more abstract concepts in the course can be experienced and embodied.

¹¹ The question itself is not relevant to understanding the exercise. The listening exercise was meant to work for a group discussion.

Penny's Reflection: Visualizing Peace of Mind

In an effort to notice new things about the nature of my mind, I designed a video experiment to answer two questions: how do emotions affect peace of mind, and can data visualization and sonification be used as a creative diagnostic tool for self-awareness?

Scribing with my camera, an old piano, and editing software, I set out to conceptualize the relationship between body and mind by mapping the ebb and flow of my emotions back onto the body. If I observe emotions as they arise—rather than suppress or seek alternative feelings—will this observation influence peace of mind and bring about awareness of the totality of experience, and is it valuable to create and view a new perspective of ourselves?

First, I needed data. I set a bell to ring on the hour every hour between 7 am and 10 pm, and for seven days I recorded the character of my experience by charting my personal activities, the events around me, my emotions and their location in the body, the feelings experienced in these emotional states, my peace of mind, and any images that appeared as thoughts in the moment. I then translated this data into an abstract visual and musical language. My peace of mind (P.O.M) was recorded as a number on a scale of one to ten, where one describes less intensity and ten describes more (figure 3). Each emotion was expressed by a different color. For example, happiness—yellow, sadness—blue, fear—grey (figure 2).

I was inspired by Nummenmaa's emBODY tool—an experiment where participants colored in blank body regions to describe the location and movement of emotions in and on the body, forming a map that linked bodily sensation to emotional processing (Nummenmaa, L. et al., 2014). However, in my experiment the human form is realistic, not an outline, and emotionally triggered body sensations appeared as shapeshifting color clouds and graphic images in the region where emotions were felt (figure 4).

To create the soundscape, each number on the peace of mind scale was represented by a different musical chord (figure 3). Emotions that I initially perceived as negative were described as minor chords, and emotions that were perceived as positive became major chords. For example, happiness (+VE) was visualized as a yellow cloud and could be accompanied by a major musical chord like C# major which is high (8) on the P.O.M scale. Whereas fear (-VE) was represented by a purple cloud and might be sonically expressed as a minor chord such as D minor, which is low (2) on the P.O.M scale (figure 2). The melody and rhythm were dictated by the feelings I experienced. The end result was a polyphonic representation of my emotional landscape.

EMOTION
Happiness
Love
Pride
Anger
Fear
Anxiety
Shame
Disgust
Contempt
Surprise
Envy
Sadness
Depression
Neutral

Figure 2: Emotion and Corresponding Color: In my experiment, emotion triggered body sensations were recorded as shapeshifting color clouds in the region where emotions were left.

P.O.M SCALE	-VE EMOTION	+VE EMOTION
1	C Minor	C Major
2	D Minor	D Major
3	E Minor	E Major
4	F Minor	F Major
5	G Minor	G Major
6	A Minor	A Major
7	B Minor	B Major
8	C \flat Minor	C \sharp Major
9	D \flat Minor	D \sharp Major
10	E \flat Minor	E \sharp Major

Figure 3: Peace of Mind Scale and Corresponding Music Chord: My peace of mind was recorded as a number on a scale of one to ten, where one described less intensity, and ten described more intensity. Each number represented a different chord.

The novelty of data gathering soon gave way to growing dissatisfaction. I rejected feeling depressed and anxious because I believed my efforts would guarantee peace of mind. Instead, I was literally feeling ‘out’ of my mind—outside of the mind. This was a turning point. I expected my experiment to lead to greater peace of mind, but as it plummeted on the scale, hour after hour, I was forced to accept the data, and simply observe without judgment. If my inner state was expressed in a different language (musical and/or visual), would this change how I perceived it?

I made a total of three videos from data collected over seven days in April, 2020. Each video was roughly 40 seconds long. Four seconds of data from Sunday the 5th of April between 1 and 2 pm (00:14 in the video) can be described as follows:

At 1pm, I felt neutral, which was expressed as a green color cloud radiating all over my body, merged with the image of a summery sky. My peace of mind was high, number 9, which was expressed as strong, ascending D major chords on the piano to represent my positive feelings (relaxed, peaceful, satisfied). When my emotion shifted to anxiety, the color cloud changed to bronze fireworks and contracted to cover just my head and torso. My peace of mind had fallen to 6, represented by a minor chord on the piano, A minor. My feelings, (now stirred up and agitated), were expressed in a heavy chord on the piano, waiting to be answered. Next, I felt love. The color cloud changed to pink, expanding to cover my head, torso and arms. My peace of mind lifted to number 8 on the scale, and a corresponding C \sharp major chord was played, but this time it was

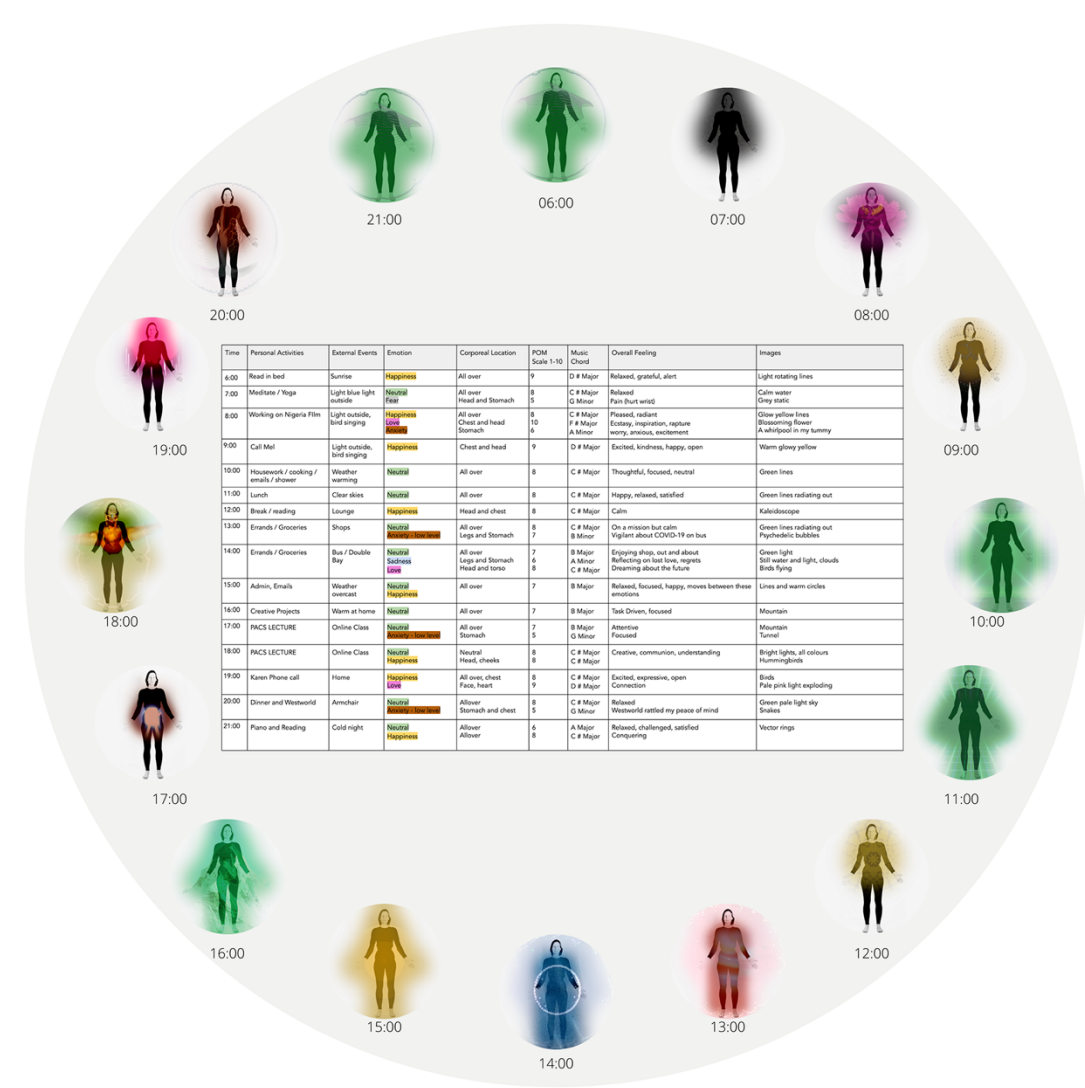
sustained (held down on the piano) to express my feelings of compassion and self-forgiveness.

From this new perspective, it was possible to notice that when I'm not mindful, my experience of life is fragmented, and I imagine a gap between body and mind and a similar gap between self and other. This persistent illusion of separation causes psychological discord, perhaps because we experience emotions directly in the body. We think there is separation, yet we feel differently. Language reinforces the sense of I, the sense of a separate self. Visually mapping emotions back onto my body reinforced that I embody emotions. I enjoyed listening to the soundtrack of my feelings and watching the colored energy fields and images flash across my body. When I viewed the data, I felt embarrassed and flawed, but when the data was translated into music and video (figure 4) I embraced the experience. We are conditioned to prefer positive emotions over negative ones, which in turn creates conflict. But if equal attention was given to negative emotions perhaps, they would be less destructive.

In the end, feeling peace of mind did not imply that I would only experience peaceful and positive feelings. It more accurately described my equanimity when it came to receiving and observing the relentless, psychedelic stream of emotions in my life. It was possible to see thoughts, memories, sense perceptions, and emotions as mental activities. For example, "I am happy" became "there is happiness". I could see how the words "I" and "mine", although useful in conventional language, can reinforce the sense of an individualized self that is having an experience. But as I watched the video—without the limitations of words to influence my perception—it was harder to mistake these phenomena for what I am; that process was interrupted. From this new perspective of my inner state, the movement of phenomena (and the patterns they made) was suddenly impersonal. These aspects of the self were revealed as a pattern, rapidly shifting, never fixed, impossible to hold onto. In the color clouds of my video, I was able to see the movement of emotions, and in the piano notes I could hear the unique tones of thoughts, but the self I had initially felt that all of this was happening to was absent. Instead, this self was reidentified as an appearance arising from the movement of these many phenomena in the moment they are experienced.

At this point, I want to acknowledge the incongruity of reflecting from the "I" whilst declaring the lack of a separate, personalized self. To communicate my experience, I have deferred to the rules of conventional language and the normative use of "I". Throughout this reflection, "I" refers to my subjective first-person experience.

The abstract arts can help bring forth that which is unrecognized or unspeakable by scrutinizing the sense of a separate, personalized self. Without words to label an experience we are simply left to identify with the experience itself. My experiment was a creative way to test the borders of this illusion in my lived experience. Recognition of the inner process of peace provides a deeper understanding of its link with outer peace. The world inside is the world outside.



¹² The data created from the five-day experiment can be accessed here:
<https://www.pennyvozniaak.com/visualising-peace-of-mind-journal>
 At the same time, the video that emerged from this data for the assignment is available here:
<https://www.pennyvozniaak.com/visualising-peace-of-mind-video>

Human Expression

In pointing out the repression of the self, urged to seek its opposite, there is release: Human expression. How do we originate integration as a sensory experience from the division of the self and discover wholeness? Human expression enables us to experiment.

Throughout the centuries we have had an unconscious hierarchy of both what and how we sense and express sensations. “The senses communicate... without compromising their unity” (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, p. 234), and they express in different ways showing qualities that make each human authentic. Breathing is a way to communicate that we are in existence, and the meaning of our sensations emerge through the body. Bateson describes aesthetics as the response to patterns that connect (Bateson, 1979). Then, experimenting with experiential learning and motions through the different manifestations of aesthetics, parts of the brain are activated. Abstract approaches can enable us to see the manifestation of those connections. The problem then is that mainstream education has prioritized reading and writing, and literate cultures did not develop to integrate human artistic expressions with enough sensitivity to *read a painting*. The human mind could be expressed to a higher potential, where perhaps “the power of reason could transcend the body” (Mueller, 2017, p. 15)—leaving behind Descartes’ legacy to separate the human mind from the world of senses (Mueller, 2017, p. 20). Descartes’ worldview dismissed teaching and learning through lived experience and the senses. “You should not trust your senses” he said to his students, adding that they should ignore the feelings of living creatures, including animals. Known as the Cartesian split of the mind, a resignation to all body sensations implied that certainty was superior (Mueller, 2017, p. 13). Reasoning and the concrete were attributed a higher value in the construction of knowledge. At the same time, nurturing, emotional, and abstract responses were hierarchically conceptualized and embodied as weak.

In his 1844 treatise for artists, Charles Bell recognized the anatomical expression of emotions, “emotion is nothing but the feeling of the reflex bodily effects” (James, 1884, p.194). Art is the expression embodied by the felt sensations; the word *art* in Latin means *Artem*, *by ability* to craft qualities. Andreas Weber said:

The medium for feeling must be emotionally shaped matter. Feeling needs matter like fish need water. Without matter the language feeling could not appear—because feeling would not be there... A work of art is at once matter and meaning. It is the material arrangement of an emotional content by means of the senses (Weber, 2016, p. 124).

As such, we focused on the sensory experience of the encounter. Stephan Harding discovers that there is more to science than analysis, reason and quantities. A moment of encounter is to contemplate qualities (Harding in Angel et al. 2011) that go beyond the intellectual capabilities (Harding, 2017).

This process acknowledges the sensory phenomenon and gives *permission* to the body to become granular and materialize the emotions. Weber refers to Jaak Pansepp on how “our interior being is expressed in one universal language, the lingua franca of the body” (Weber, 2016 p.124). Embodiment is going through a reflective experience to unify the body and the mind (Varela et al., 1993, p. 27). The unconventional assignment was the medium to the students’ reflection.

Safety spaces to witness knowledge emerging from the inner senses are necessary. Porges argues that “only when we are in a calm physiological state can we convey cues of safety to another” (2017, p. 50). It will be challenging then to distinguish between “safety” and “danger” when someone lacks a real sense of inner security (Van der Kolk, 2014, p. 119). In programs designed for peacebuilders and changemakers, using disembodied methods to engage with the unseen and human vulnerability is contradictory. Maturana and Varela (1987) said that we are humans because of language, through behavior we generate mechanisms to communicate. “The universal language is an existential meaning conveyed through expressive form. And the form leading to that meaning can be expressed by any number of expressive means” (Weber, 2016, p.125). Humans express! The “bodily process” reveals “many visible, tactile, audible, olfactory and other perceptual dimensions” (Weber, 2016, p. 89). Scharmer, inspired by Rudolf Steiner, states: “Trust your senses, trust your observations, trust your own perception as the fundamental starting point of any investigation” (2016, 31).

Teaching and assessing with different resources such as paintings, scribing, or weaving can be challenging for mainstream higher education. It is a learning curve process in which catching up to access these other intelligences in academia will take time. Yet, in continuing the inspiration with indigeneity culture, the craft (process) is as essential as the art (final piece) produced. Chacon explains that imprints embody the authorship when weavers give body to their creation (2020, p. 64). This paper recognized print-based literacy limitations on embodying the authorship and argues that focusing on crafting expression with complexity beyond authorship is necessary to foster conscious agency.

Conclusion

What if a demonstrated and deep understanding gained from the learning process was assigned an academic value? Wisdom as the meaning of deep understanding is something attained, it is a quality of knowledge that evolves in depth, it is abstract and non-hierarchical. Non-writing modes of expression deserve equal value in academia precisely because they challenge hierarchical thinking. How will peacebuilders and changemakers benefit the vulnerable if their own vulnerability, and their sense of separateness from the world, remains intact and unrecognized?

Breaking the illusion of separation could be the key to ending and restoring the split between mind and body, self and other, human and nature. To know this cognitively is not enough, we must experience and feel it to shift the current paradigm of Western thinking. Failing to recognize the illusion creates conflict

and disturbs inner peace. Albert Einstein recognized humans are part of the whole:

A human being is part of the whole, called by us 'Universe,' a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. The striving to free oneself from this delusion is the one issue of true religion. Not to nourish it but to try to overcome it is the to reach the attainable measure of peace of mind (Einstein, 1950).

We have to overcome the sense of separation by integrating the abject. Abject can be cathartic (Kristeva, 1982). For this reason, confrontations with the abject, when framed creatively, can serve as potential sites for transformation. The key to enabling embracing processes and attentiveness to the interior condition in relatedness to processes is authenticity. With *trust*, students like Penny were willing to break the hierarchy in ways of expression, experimenting with how they could work intuitively to best address their understanding of the subject—in this case—their inner peace in relation to outer peace. In understanding the split of body and mind, we perceive the hierarchically superior value given to the concrete, the seen, the visible force, and what we believe has certainty. In the symbolic space, there is potential for reflection and transformation. The movement between the real and the symbolic can help break down the boundaries of separation.

This paper argued that *being* a changemaker for a more peaceful and secure world requires us to encounter non-cognitive centric ways of learning in order *to be* vulnerable. Taking an epistemological approach to peace and security is not enough to break the cycles of violence. Lederach proposes to create spaces for inner dialogue and “to-talk-to-ourselves”. A creative and imaginative approach where judgement is suspended, and inquiry emerges. In order to build peace, he suggests that we need “the imagination of risk” because violence is known, and peace is unknown (Lederach, 2005, p. 39). We must learn to embrace the unknown to see ourselves in the terrifying Other—the abject. Otherness emerges from embodied information, a process Ihde’s refers to as “embodiment relation” (Ihde, 1979, p. 9). The abject denies the ability of the I to be in presence. Reducing the abject to only the visual frame creates a safe distance to examine the relationship without fear of the abject “invading our boundaries” (Seegert, 2014, p.11). Penny explored her relationship to the abject in the video experiment:

I was faced with a destabilizing paradox. I created the video as a medium to explore the wholeness of human experience, yet found myself rejecting parts of the process that were too uncomfortable to integrate into the experience, thus reinforcing the split I was attempting to prove was an illusion. But this is precisely how the abject functions, it can be used as a psychic strategy to highlight flawed subjectivity and identity. Untangling and deciphering

paradoxes is the domain of the abject. What is designated as abject decenters the beholder, but fear and retreat are optional. The groundlessness of primal horror can be a signal; a roaring reminder that separation is a collective delusion, the enemy of peace, a limiter in the wholeness of life.

Incorporating experiential teaching and assessment through embodying knowledge, shifted student perception in relation to inner and outer peace. Can a shift in perception mean that someone has transformed? This paper does not sustain that students were transformed or changed from point *a* to point *b*. Transforming students was not part of the purpose. Instead, the aim of redesigning the course was to enable different ways of expression to account for new realities. If students shifted perception or were “transformed,” it is the result of exposure to other methods in teaching, learning and assessing. The assessment demonstrated that experimenting with inner peace is an ongoing process that only exists when expressing (doing) and subject in movement (being) are in relationship to something and not isolated actions. It is an evolving phenomenon and not always perceptible to human eyes. For most students, concluding how inner peace is intrinsically linked to outer peace was genuinely new.

We conclude that higher education needs to value nurturing and emotional responses to enable other expressions to emerge. We argued that painting and weaving in Indigenous cultures contained a vast amount of knowledge, and intuition and embodiment were needed to interpret the information. These *invisible* intelligences were not developed at the same pace as print-based literacy; therefore, students—unless they are art students—lack the sensibility to consciously embody a painting, a textile, a mapping of emotions, or nature. The arts, of course, includes writing as a form of expression, and mixed creative genres such as poetry and music. The argument is not vilifying reading and writing. The point is, education hierarchically defines being literate as having an education, and this is typically embedded within culture, activating *othering*. To what degree is culture subconsciously embodied? Western acculturation established print-based literacy and linear knowledge as ‘certain’ and ‘higher’ human expressions to the other values. As a result, for example, Indigenous oral languages are seen as inferior in the dominant model of Western Education, giving space to reductive labelling, or *othering* as non-literate, non-educated. The result is that in mainstream higher education there is not enough sensibility and *situatedness* to apprehend Indigenous cosmovision. Yet, if we consider the classroom as a space for experimenting with our own transformation, then we are open to exploring complex inner dynamics such as integrating the split (the separation of the self). Consciously embodied sensibility is to be one with the self, the other, and the Earth again.

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Peer-Reviewed Article

The Reflexible Person:

Toward an Epistemological Learning Culture

Rolf Arnold

Department of Education, TU Kaiserslautern
arnold@sowi.uni-kl.de

Michael Schön

Department of Education, TU Kaiserslautern
michael.schoen@sowi.uni-kl.de

Abstract

Referring to the European and especially the German education system, this article first identifies that both forms of governance in educational systems as well as pedagogical professionalization have fallen behind. We present new proposals for a substantive and evidence-based reinterpretation and reshaping of what education is and can be and how educational systems can be changed. In order to address these shortcomings, we follow suggestions of a systemic-constructivist pedagogy, and highlight concrete strategies, and starting points of an awareness-based system change in the field of educational system development are pointed out. This attempt to not only rethink education, but also to shape it, is based on a critical analysis of the often stagnant internal educational reforms and the concepts and routines that characterize these stagnant reforms. We hypothesize that, in order to break free from this stagnation, a continuous self-transforming subjectivity of the responsible actors is necessary. This explanatory framework is extended in this article to the figure

of the “reflexible person” (Arnold, 2019a), whose main characteristic is reflexivity, in the sense of being reflexive as well as flexible. The reflexible person possesses practiced and strengthened competencies for observation and reflection including of the self, as well as reinterpretation and transformation. These competences are substantiated and specified as prerequisites and effective conditions for an awareness-based system change in educational systems. In addition, possible ways of promoting and developing them are pointed out.

Keywords

vocational education; vocational training; learning culture; self-awareness; self-reflection; personality development

Introduction

This article is both analytical and programmatic. We begin with the evident processes of change in the labor market and in society, which have led to changed expectations of the education systems of modern societies. These expectations are illustrated by the example of European—especially German—education policy.

New policies:

- found their early expression beginning in 1987 in efforts to improve vocational education and training (VET), the possibilities and effects of which were tested and researched in state-funded pilot projects (see, e.g., Staudt, 1993);
- led to redefining the concept of education in Germany’s first national education report in 2006, which identified individual regulatory competence as the primary concern of education (Konsortium Bildungsberichterstattung, 2006);
- became binding through the European Qualifications Framework of 2008, which mandated that national education systems develop competences for meeting new (!) demands (European Parliament Council, 2008); and
- are also reflected in memoranda of German employers and employers’ associations, which promote an expanded understanding of education that encompasses more than professional competence (e.g., VEW, 2015).

The programmatic nature of the argument presented here results from our impression that these expectations of the education systems have not yet been reflected in new governance forms (e.g., school development, pedagogical leadership), and pedagogical professionalization (e.g., teacher training) on a broad scale. We assume that the delays are the result of vain attempts to understand, judge, and shape the future of education using the concepts and explanations of the past.

In this paper, we make new proposals for a substantive and evidence-based reinterpretation and reshaping of what education is and can be. We also discuss whether education systems are in fact capable of being changed. In doing so, we follow the suggestions of a *systemic-constructivist pedagogy* (e.g., Arnold & Siebert, 1995; Marlowe & Page, 1998; Reich, 1996), which in recent decades has increasingly developed into a science of the self-organization of the systemic at the individual, organizational, and societal levels (e.g., Arnold, 2015, 2017; Bagnall & Hodge, 2018; Boyer et al., 2014; Siebert, 2017). These proposals arise from our own research and experiments in processes of systemic change at the levels mentioned.¹ *For the first time*, they highlight concrete strategies and starting points of awareness-based system change in the field of educational systems.

This attempt not only to rethink education, but also to shape it, is based on a critical analysis of internal educational reform and its concepts and routines (point 1 below). It spells out the need for new subjectivity, or *flexibility*, by the responsible actors, as described by Richard Sennett (1998), among others. This explanatory framework is extended here to the figure of the “reflexible person” (Arnold, 2019a, p. 2ff.) (point 2 below). The *reflexible person* has strengthened and renewed competences that include the ability for an observation that includes the self (thereafter named as self-included observation), reflection, reinterpretation, and reimagining. In this paper these competences will be positioned as prerequisites for an awareness-based transformation of educational systems. Furthermore, we will identify possible ways of promoting and developing these competences (point 3).

The education systems we focus on here are the general vocational education systems, as well as higher education. In these systems, the aforementioned concerns about change and education policy have been debated repeatedly over the past 20 years, without, however, producing any sustainable systemic change.

Innovation and Stagnation

Amongst the main concerns and tasks of educational institutions in modern societies is to anticipate future demands on society and to that end develop training and education program in the present moment, that serve to prepare current students to meet these anticipated future demands (Billett, 2011; Sylte, 2020). The pedagogical considerations placed on these programs therefore focus on the future and the assumed ways it relates to the present. But in times which are characterized by a steady increase in knowledge, and by a trend in which innovations are increasingly shaped by disruptive solutions, it becomes increasingly challenging for the systems of economy and education alike to try to

¹ Our research took place in educational settings in Colombia, Honduras, Bosnia, Luxembourg, and Belgium, as well as in company personnel development, management training, and teacher training.

predict future requirements of economy and society *and* to derive curricular specifications out of these.

These tendencies fundamentally challenge traditional notions of education, since the supposedly safe ground of what once was seen as professionally unambiguous and necessary in itself is now subject to erosion. At the same time one can discern both professionalization and de-professionalization, which recalibrate the actions of teachers and learners (Maclean & Wilson, 2009; Siebert et al., 2018) and overcome the focus on the individual. In a digitally connected world, one can no longer expect all competencies to be concentrated in one person.

Instead, networks of people with different specializations and competitive advantages are expected. Both individuals and organizations must learn to deal with unpredictability, openness, and uncertainty about the future. In addition to technical and behavioral competences, personality development that strengthens the resilience of individuals is becoming increasingly relevant. The question of how to promote and develop self-learning competences, as well as skills of self-reflection and self-transformation, will become more relevant for future education systems.

In recent years, the educational sciences, above all systemic-constructivist pedagogy, have turned to questions about the possibilities and limits of awareness-based change in individuals, groups, organizations and societies. In doing so, they have increasingly considered the assumption that targeted interventions in established structures of habit and certainty are hardly possible. Since cognition and emotion are understood and described as relatively closed autopoietic systems, changes to these systems can only be initiated as processes of self-transformation (Dekkers, 2017; Thompson, 2007).

While such a self-transformation can be stimulated, facilitated and accompanied, its effects cannot be guaranteed (Arnold, 2019b). Nonetheless, it is possible to observe and get a felt sense of the inner interrelationships of these transformative processes. Also, one can increase the probability of leading to effects through resonant forms of engagement and facilitation (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; McKee et al., 2008; Rosa, 2019). Such a systemic view of things is oriented toward outcomes, i.e., *observing impact* and *using resonance*. In simple terms we are referring with the latter to the abilities of connecting with others, understanding their desires and helping them to enhance their capacities (McKee et al., 2008). At the same time, the pedagogical discourse has begun to move away from naive hopes of the efficacy of intervention as well as from linear-mechanistic concepts of instruction. Instead it shifted toward trying out pedagogical forms that enable (rather than produce or even force) the expected and desired development of competencies as processes of a self-organized maturation of systems (e.g., Brater, 2020; Morris, 2019a).

The didactical implications of this paradigm shift are fundamental: In learning, the formerly dominant role of teaching is moved to the margins, while a view on the competence-building effect of learning processes that are largely self-

organized comes into focus (Arnold, 2019a; Morris, 2019b). The same applies to concepts of didactics: curricular didactics is partially lost and is partially replaced by what Arnold and Schön (2019) frame as enabling didactics. In the process, notions of a first-order identity and competence development have evolved into notions of second-order learning (Arnold, 2021)—hence in today’s education the focus is no longer primarily and exclusively on learning about something (first-order learning), but on learning to learn and to optimize the sustainability of what has been learned (second-order learning).

Learning thereby becomes the primary vehicle for personality formation, the core of which involve the abilities to reorient and to change oneself as well as to take responsibility for one’s own learning process. At the same time, the rootedness of identity and competence development in deep emotions is given greater consideration. Also, it is recognized that new forms of pedagogical professionalism are necessary to initiate, accompany, and shape the transformation of emotional-cognitive certainties and routines in resonant ways.

This paradigm shift is clearly shaping research and theory formation in European and especially German-language pedagogical discourse (Brater, 2020; Siebert, 2017; Sloane, 2020). In our opinion, the urgently needed implementation of this paradigm shift in schools, companies, adult education institutions and universities has only just begun. The evidence of pedagogical research (e.g., on the provable interactions between teaching and learning or the ineffectiveness of educational interventions in general), in many places gets lost due to traditional and habitualized pedagogical certainties. From an awareness-based systems change perspective we assume, that these (supposed) certainties can only be effectively tackled with *fresh thinking*—to reach “a deeper source of creativity” (Scharmer, 2009, p.34)—as well as through the strengthening of forms of professionalism that includes the self on the part of the responsible actors (especially leadership and teaching staff) in educational institutions.

From Flexibility to Reflexibility

The first step in *fresh thinking* about education systems and their transformation is to examine and develop a contemporary theory about the function that a socially responsible education should and can fulfill. In this context, “contemporary” marks a benchmark in how far the aforementioned insights into the complex interrelationships of effects in the learning processes of identity and competence development are being considered. The same applies to the goals that education should and can serve. As already mentioned, education—according to the expectations documented at the beginning—should contribute toward strengthening an individual’s ability to self-regulate and enable him or her to successfully cope with new and unforeseen demands. In such competence requirements, the basic subject qualities of flexibility, already described in Sennett’s conception of the “flexible man” (1998), find their expression.

In our opinion, the concept of Sennett’s *flexible person* is of central importance, but at the same time—according to our proposition—it only

imperfectly considers the core of the competence dimensions that are increasingly coming into focus. As outlined in the book *Escape from Teaching* (Arnold 2019a, p. 2 ff.), the changing demands of the new, the unexpected and the disruptive require of people not only “flexibility” (in the sense of openness to change), but also “reflexivity” (in the sense of recognizing and stepping out of familiar patterns of thinking, feeling and acting)—put in one newly created word: “reflexibility” (accompanied by the artificial adjective “reflexible”). The expectation of flexibility on the actors is thereby extended by a dimension that ultimately has to be seen as being epistemological at its core, in which the actor is aware of the self-fulfilling power of his habits of perception and thinking as well as how he or she is internally tied to traditions and routine. The reflexive person knows that these ties always tempt him or her to cling to his certainties and to construct the future based on his own experiences, thus contributing to the future remaining more or less as the past has been.

Not infrequently, this attitude leads the actor to actually miss out on the manifold possibilities the open future holds, due to the holding on to images from the past. In view of spectacular company collapses, as in the case of Kodak or Nokia, or far-reaching environmental scandals, as in the case of the VW Group, many companies today are asking themselves whether they really employ the right specialists and managers. When selecting them, do they only honor adapted or expected thinking and acting, or do they also value deviating or even pattern-breaking potential? How important are moral conduct and social responsibility? Ultimately, the central problem is: How can modern societies ensure not only that their professional and managerial staff imagine the world in the way they have learned, but also that they themselves are the ones who repeatedly question previous solutions? However, it is not only professionals and managers who are expected to be more reflexible. In general, in view of the climate crisis and globalization, modern societies are increasingly confronted with the need to sustainably transform previous ways of thinking and living—a need that comes with very personal consequences for the way people think, feel and act.

The consequences for the educational institutions of modern societies are fundamental. They are required to rethink the offerings and forms of their education. The key question is how learners can be prepared for a future that is open and whose requirements cannot be adequately described simply by projecting what has gone before. So far, educational theory and policy have reacted rather cautiously and with partial corrections. There is talk of, among other things, a clearer focus on developing “self-sharpening qualifications” (Bauerdick et al., 1993, p. 114) or strengthening key *competencies* that enable people to deal successfully with new demands of any kind when they encounter them (Arnold, 2020).

As Brater (2020) notes, for example, one can clearly see how today, in many places, the demands of the world of life and work are turning into demands for the free development of the personality. Accordingly—he argues—any vocational preparation, precisely because it is oriented toward the demands of the world of

work, must increasingly become a *general personality education*. Schools, universities, companies, and educational institutions of all kinds are thus transforming themselves into *competence centers* for dealing with constructions of reality. Therefore, these institutions need in-house “experts of not-knowing”, i.e., experts who understand a lot about identity, personality and competence development, but who can suppress this knowledge in order not to make inappropriate diagnoses or intervene hastily with their own expertise trying to ‘get it right’. The learners must not be deprived of the necessary emotionalizing moment of successfully designing and solving problems by and for themselves. Education can thus become a process of *competence and identity formation* (Arnold, 2019b), which initiates, enables and accompanies the comprehensive personality development of the learners.

Also, the scientific observation and description of these changing forms of education is facing a fundamental turn, for which preliminary work is only available in the context of systemic pedagogy and competence didactics. These disciplines are concerned with the question of how reflecting about and transforming biographically acquired patterns of interpretation can be initiated and shaped, since self-organizing systems always decide for themselves what becomes of the well-meant and professionally contributed impulses that are addressed upon them. Pedagogy as a discipline must therefore increasingly detach itself from an input based conception of education toward a lifespan and change science. Its primary knowledge interest thus lies in gaining a deeper understanding of the self-organization of subjects in their biographical and lifeworld-related embeddedness. On a practical side it is therefore searching for ways of lifting current patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting into the awareness of learners and how to accompany learners in making newly acquired interpretation options a reality. This is because the abilities to construct, reinterpret, and reshape knowledge in Piaget’s sense of accommodation (Piaget, 1964), or in the sense of transformative learning in adulthood (Kegan, 2000), form the very core of lifelong learning, that both prepares subjects for change as well as empowers them to deal with that change in appropriate and successful ways (Arnold, 2021; Eschenbacher & Fleming, 2020). Personality development understood in that way can be defined as the ability to perform *self-reflection* and *dispassionate examination*, as well as *reflexive, socially embedded, and resonant action* (Arnold, 2020).

Personality Development Is Self-development— Self-development Is Awareness Development

Personality development is self-education in a twofold sense: On the one hand personality development emerges from a willingness and movement within the learner; it cannot be triggered in its depth from the outside by didactic inputs. On the other hand, the object of learning for the learner is his or her own self. It is his or her forms of self-expression, his or her preferred ways of thinking, feeling and acting, which he or she chooses or avoids to examine and, if

necessary, engage with in different ways to be both in and with the world. As a consequence, he or she is able to increase the number of possibilities for action he or she has at his or her disposal. This movement, at the same time, also has to be understood as development of awareness.

Learners who engage in this form of education about themselves, are able to imagine the future in different ways than how their own experiences and accumulated knowledge might spontaneously suggest to them. Repeatedly, it is their reflexible abilities that lead them into a loop of reflection coupled with a parallel effort to make one's supposedly familiar world to appear *anew*, that is, with new potentials previously hidden from one's perspective (Arnold, 2019a). This dimension of a reflexible form of personality development builds on epistemological considerations; in itself it has to be understood as an applied epistemology. In this way, it follows the suggestions of the Chilean neurobiologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, who as early as the 1970s/80s have positioned people's ways of conceptualizing reality and perceptual routines as representing the main concern when focusing on change and in doing so plead for strengthening abilities for a *self-included* observation and reflection (e.g., Maturana, 1978; Maturana & Varela, 1980).

In their work, Maturana and Varela assumed that not only our perception and cognition but also our states of consciousness are merely the result and expression of the senses and brain functions, as well as the biographically acquired patterns of emotion and interpretation (Varela et al., 2016). According to Metzinger (2009), consciousness has a tunnel-like character that allows people to see only what they already 'know', anticipate or fear, and therefore to constantly repeat their lives. However, they can escape this *ego tunnel*, as Metzinger calls it, through "self-included reflection"—such were the hopes of Francisco Varela (Varela et al., 2016, p. 28). Whether, how and in which direction a permanent further development of this "accidental equipment" of humans is possible, and whether a sustainable change in consciousness can be attained via the path of self-included education, is one of the core questions of the still emerging field of consciousness research.

This kind of self-included education detaches itself from the question of *what* the topic or task is and essentially turns to the question of *how* one is accustomed to *interpreting* and *thinking about* the events and which possibilities are seen or overlooked in the process (Arnold, 2014)—a change of perspective that has also been strongly advocated by Peter Senge, among others (Senge et al., 2005, 2008). Presence and mindfulness are seen as core elements of any formative competence in dealing with the unpredictable, as is now empirically supported by numerous studies (e.g., Feuerborn & Gueldner, 2019; Reb et al., 2014; Rupperecht et al., 2019). In order to promote presence and mindfulness, educational offerings (e.g., leadership qualification or higher education) are turning much more to the possibilities of *identity learning*, which leads participants in biographical and thematic search movements for guided self-reflection (Dybbroe, 2012; Illiff et al., 2019; Illeris, 2014). Mindfulness training is also experiencing a significant

upsurge in the commercial education market (Forbes, 2019). American universities have been engaged in contemplative training of their students for decades (Astin et al., 2011; Gunnlaugson et al., 2014); recent social science concepts place mindfulness-based social change practices at the center of thinking about how individuals, organizations and societies can change sustainably (Bockler, 2021).

At the same time, in the context of accelerated and, in many areas, disruptive pushes of modernization (Rosa, 2019), the question gains importance as to whether succeeding in leading a good life in times of change does not depend precisely on being able to take into account and extend previously entrenched forms of observing, interpreting, so as to judge with new or “fresh” forms of reality construction that open up further perspectives. Even if at first there seems to be little to support these new constructions of the future, they can become more and more real if they are consciously focused on, visualized and emphatically practiced. In this sense, Scharmer (2018), for example, speaks of a type of learning that operates from the future—desired, possible or ideal—of the individual, a group, organization or society that wants to or could emerge: Presencing.

Such a development of awareness is not only *radically subject-oriented*, it *also* follows the above-mentioned concept of *second-order learning*. The focus is on the ways in which individual learners appropriate their learning and whilst doing so which of their typical peculiarities are revealed and repeated. The learning practices of the self are at the center of attention: the self’s own awareness of itself and the world. It is also about strengthening the insight that this awareness, as it is, is neither right nor wrong—but that it determines and places boundaries upon the subject, can be predicted, closes off new perspectives and (mis-)leads to inappropriate actions. Such a development of awareness follows the contingent principle that ‘it could also be completely different’ and knows the limitations of self-formation and transformation: Awareness is ultimately only a well-cleaned pair of glasses through which we look at the world—but we can never replace these glasses themselves (Eckoldt, 2017). Nevertheless, over time, people think, feel and act more mindfully and, in many cases, more tolerantly toward themselves and the world if they remain deeply aware of the fact that they too are only capable of looking at the world through their glasses. They learn that they are not able to recognize the world as it is, but only as they themselves are or have become.

Awareness development can nonetheless save us from what we call common awareness traps. These kinds of traps show up when people:

- want to vehemently cling to their habitual ways of feeling and acting about themselves and the world at all costs—even in the face of evidence-based arguments;
- surround themselves with like-minded people in their everyday contexts, modes of information and preferred paths of discourse, or avoid foreign and unsettling contexts;

- hope that scientific ways of knowing and recognizing can also prepare us to develop more effective skills for successfully dealing with highly emotional or destructive experience and/or situations—such an understanding too must be seen as an abridged reading of the adult educational claim to enlightenment;
- implicitly assume that their conscious ways of thinking, representing and judging can connect them to a ‘true’ reality and that this reality also holds evident to others with similar persuasive power. The ‘illusion of conscious thought’ (Carruthers, 2017, p. 228) is unfamiliar to these people.

Awareness development sensitizes people to these everyday threats and supports learners in their search for a strengthening of an inner core which does not have “let us keep up” within its repertoire. A mindset where everything must always be done the same way, just because it has always been done that way, is alien to these learners. Already the simple notion of “keep it up” raises questions about one’s own awareness: What do I want to keep up in dealing with myself and the world, and what do I want to change in the time I have left? In what direction do I want to mature? When do I live consciously, and when am I stuck in repetitions or in forms of thinking, feeling and acting that have nothing or little to do with the current situation and the world around me? How can I interpret and interact more freshly and effectively in shaping a common future? The development of awareness is the effort to achieve an unemotional observer position from which one’s own self and the world can be recognized or perceived with all possibilities that so far had been in one’s blind spot.

The following example serves as an illustration: Leaders who act reflexively know that their impressions are merely easily comprehensible activities of their mind and are therefore able to swim against their own inner current. They have a *meta-consciousness* at their disposal, that can free them from “the prison of their automatic reactions”, as Siegel (2010) describes it. In order to release the reflexive potential of such a meta-consciousness and to further develop it into a mindful attitude, different paths need to be taken, whose usefulness has so far only been rudimentarily tested, and examined in the context of effective leadership development. These paths would have to follow a four-stage strategy, of which each individual stage are dedicated to different development tasks, as shown in Figure 1.

Stages			Description (Development task)
		Transformation – or: practicing self-transformation	Striving for an effective synaptic anchoring and automation of the new expressions of the intended ego in regular focus and meditation work.
	Self-direction – or: the intended ego		Being able to develop a clear picture of one's own forms of feeling and being in the world and imagining this in clear pictures.
	Emancipation – or: the second-order liberation		Being able to detach oneself from adopted or brought-along forms of dealing with oneself and others and to allow other possibilities.
Brain – or: the little brain science			Knowing the transparent mechanisms and workings of our emotion and cognition and how these influence our here-and-now interpretations and reactions.

Figure 1: The BEST strategy of self-transformation

The movement along the four stages of the so called BEST strategy depicted in Table 1 describe the reflexive process of awareness development. In its course, forms of self-observation and self-reflection are practiced, through which learners are enabled to arrive at a changed attitude toward themselves and the world. In this learning process, leaders do acquire some tools that help them to pause, step back and learn to construct anew. The decisive effect, however, is a competence to relativize their own certainties and to deconstruct familiar truths. They literally trans-form their way of observation: they no longer simply observe external circumstances (e.g., operational processes, decision-making situations, conflicts, etc.), but also observe their own observing (Scharmer, 2001). After some practice, they are increasingly able to notice within their own habits when they, once again, are endangered to fall into repetitive loops in which they routinely interpret the world and do not create an internal space for other possible ways of seeing and evaluating. They realize that they are in the process of *leading from the past* (Scharmer, 2009, 2018) and thereby helping to ensure that the future will become like the past has been.

Heading toward Epistemological Learning Cultures

The question “How do we know what we know?” marks the way to a different culture of observing, judging and interacting in organizations as well as in processes of teaching and learning. The main focus lies on the goal of relating to

each other in more resonant ways and being open to differences and diversity. The aforementioned abilities to deal (re-)flexibly with one's own observations and acts of judgement as well as to change habitual patterns of thinking, being and cooperating are fundamental prerequisites to achieve this goal. They are also at the center of recent discussions around agility as being a foundation for leadership and learning organizations (Arnold, 2021). We argue that agile thinking, feeling and acting should themselves follow a disruptive logic. This means that actors must increasingly practice not always seeing the old in the new, nor wanting to develop the future with the means of the past—and thus missing out on emerging opportunities (Rigby et al., 2020). Companies must constantly question and literally attack themselves disruptively to avoid being surprised by disruptions—or competitors—from the outside. In this context, there is scientific talk of epistemological learning as well as corporate cultures (Langemeyer, 2015).

Epistemological learning and cooperation cultures are based on the inner—ultimately also emotional—capacities of the actors, who decide which changes they aspire to or are confident in and able to endure. Contemporary leadership development therefore offers opportunities for biographical self-reflection and self-transformation (Arnold, 2014), in which the question of how one thinks, feels and acts can be clarified. Only based on such clarifications can *disruptive thinking* emerge (von Mutius, 2017). By this we mean a view of the world and of oneself that is not oriented to standards of the past but to possibilities of the future. Crucial for this are personal—and to a certain extent extra- or supra-disciplinary—key competences (e.g., Brockmann et al., 2011; Weinert, 2001), such as the abilities:

- to change cherished perceptions and routines,
- to communicate and cooperate synergistically,
- to learn in a self-directed manner,
- to independently develop, assess and use sources of knowledge,
- to shape new demands and issues, as well as
- to act in a self-responsible and just manner.

In this context, a sustainable *transformation* of one's own orientations and competencies presupposes that the encounter with other ways of shaping and enduring the world can be designed in emotionally moving and destabilizing ways (e.g., Erpenbeck, 2018; Erpenbeck & Sauter, 2019; Mezirow & Taylor, 2009; Mälkki, 2019; Morris, 2020; Taylor & Cranton, 2012, 2013). Thereby, value orientations come into play that support the bridging of missing knowledge and help to shape action.

Numerous companies are asking themselves whether and how values and attitudes can be changed and developed (Permantier, 2019), e.g., to allow *disruptive personality types* to mature—a question on which moral pedagogical research of recent decades has already produced some insights. Research in this

mentioned field has shown that people form their supporting value orientations already in the dense emotional experiences of childhood (Teschmer, 2014). These value orientations cannot be changed in later life through information, instruction and discourse or even persuasion. Only in genuine *emotional resonance* in direct encounter—similar to those we had been exposed to in our early lives—can a lasting change in value orientations be triggered (Arnold, 2019a). In order to ensure such an emotional contextualization of change, it is not necessary to address and connect the actors themselves to their own critical life events. Even the idea of upcoming changes (e.g., in the professional role, at work, in the partnership, etc.) can have an emotionalizing effect. In this case, one's own insecurities or fears become the topic (e.g., in case of illness, loss) and the potential shock becomes a connecting point to initiate profound clarifications of values.

At the core of resonant forms of human resource development is a more conscious attitude of employees toward themselves and toward life. Epistemological learning and corporate cultures can develop if trainees, students and employees deal with the following questions at an early stage: “Who am I? What are my most deeply felt values? Do I have a mission or purpose in my life? Why am I in college? What kind of person do I want to become? What kind of world do I want to help create?” (Astin et al., 2011, p. 1).

Interestingly, the very question about the human condition seems to be frighteningly unpopular in contemporary pedagogy. Yet it is precisely the view from the outside—the view from the non-self—that opens up access to explanatory approaches that go beyond our own previously held thought patterns. A large number of North American educators and scholars from a wide range of disciplines support such a transformative perspective and either positioning a contemplative turn or are working to develop contemplative pedagogies (e.g., Astin et al., 2011; Barbezat & Bush, 2014; Gunnlaugson et al., 2014; Palmer et al., 2010). For them, the insight is fundamental: that people are not what they think they are, and that they also do not have to remain how they—accidentally (!)—have become through the conditions and peculiarities of their lives. The goal of a contemplative, transformative pedagogy is to foster a mindful, differentiating and formative approach to reality—both of one's internal and the supposed external reality. In particular, the aim is to develop the ability to become clearly aware of one's own subjectivity in the world and to use this awareness without bias (Roth, 2014). With such an attitude—a first-person approach to mindful observing, as we already know it from Edmund Husserl's phenomenology (Husserl, 1931, 1970)—one learns to observe, feel and act differently; one leaves behind both the third-person approach and the object-centered approach of scientific observing.

Such “self-included reflection” (Varela et al., 2016, p. 28) follows Ludwig Wittgenstein's observation that “Because it seems so to me—or to everybody—it does not follow that it is so” (Wittgenstein, 1977, p. 29). Those who practice mindfulness in this way act in the unemotional awareness of how trivial and

transparent their own perceptions, judgments, language and interaction work within them. It becomes clear to the practitioner that people constantly fall short of their possibilities and that often their own lives repeat unreflexive patterns. “Have courage to use your own reason”, Immanuel Kant once declared as a motto of the Enlightenment (Kant, 1784/1963, p. 3), and this invitation could also be applied to breaking open our own entrenched thought patterns in order to reflect on them intentionally and to transform them, if necessary.

The concern of a more contemplative and self-reflexive educational movement is to deepen one’s own or individual access to the world. This involves dimensions of personality and attitude formation that are not new but had already been positioned alongside the material theories of education following Wilhelm von Humboldt (Bruford, 1975). This form of personality education is about strengthening the ego-forces and potentials of the individual, and about promoting well-grounded ways of positioning oneself alongside what life actually means and continuously developing his or her self-education and self-learning competences. A sustainable promotion and development of such competences has less to do with the contents of curricula, study and training regulations than with the emotional imprints and experiences of the individual within his or her own biographical development. The learner can question and break open these imprints through guided and accompanied self-reflection. Such a mindful self-reflexive form of dealing with one’s own ego states (e.g., one’s own parental or professional role, or disengagement) confronts learners with the task of active and anticipatory self-socialization. For them, the new clarification of the ideal Self is a constant task. This becomes a central component of a curative self-care in an agile attitude to life. For this attitude the systemic guiding principle also applies, that externally there can only be possibilities to interpret and endure (one’s own) world drawn from those which have been laid as foundation internally.

Let us illustrate this with another example. Following our explanations above, learners are required in their daily self-care to face the imagination of their personal ideal state—be it as creators of lively encounters or sustainable development processes. This movement can be stimulated and supported by guided meditation, such as that outlined in Figure 2. Our own experience in numerous seminars has shown that guided meditation can lead learners to a radical ego clarification that revolves around the question of who we actually are outside of our habits of thinking and feeling, which we ourselves notice and which we can observe. In doing so, we can gradually arrive at an inner core that senses itself merely as an observer who recognizes itself, recognizes that it recognizes, senses and tries other possibilities, practices to refer itself to this inner core so as not to get caught in cycles of (re-)acting in expected ways. In this movement, we do not “clarify” this ego question conclusively, but we learn to observe how we deal with the question in our lives: using language formulas, being evasive, doubtful, defiant, etc. Agility in this context means being able to leave one’s own universe and being able to move into multiverses—seeking diversity and engaging with it. Taking the step into a distanced observer position

in relation to what one has biographically become and what encompasses one's lifeworld is an achievement that can be compared to Münchhausen's gesture of pulling himself out of the swamp by his own hair. This is a very vivid image, which has already been used in the systemic debate (Watzlawick, 1990).

Detach yourself from the intention to influence the thoughts, feelings and actions of others and dedicate yourself to your 'inner job'!	
Phase	Instruction/question
Retrospect	1. Through which perspectives have I learned to look at and endure the world?
	2. Which guiding distinctions have I learned and adopted before today (e.g., good—evil, just—unjust, living—dead)?
	3. Who set an example for me?
	4. Did I observe other distinctions in others that I did not adopt?
Imagination of a new alternative self	5. I detach myself from my simple guiding distinctions in order to trace the diversity of life.
	6. I develop and follow other guiding distinctions (e.g., development-promoting—development-preventing, appreciative—non-appreciative, dominant—resonant).
	7. I am able to deal with unpleasant or even destructive feelings by repeatedly making it clear to myself that they are merely inside me.
Habitualization	8. I start the day by observing my body and its emotional state and devote myself to it lovingly.
	9. I practice other states of emotion that I learn to call up in myself.
	10. I observe every day how I—preferentially—observe and look self-critically at this routine that only lets be what I know!
	11. I observe more perceptively and pay more attention to the resonance in the other person than to my own ideas.

Figure 2: Meditation for learners: *My life is (also) daily focus work* (Arnold, 2019c, p. 218).

Ultimately, our own attitudes determine how we deal with knowledge and certainties. Those who lack the ability to be contemplative may be more likely to believe in a worldview of technical controllability and objective truths, while those with contemplative abilities are more likely to seek connection and commonality. Above all, the focus is on the search movement and consensus. You have to be fully aware of the Socratic observation that all you know is that you do not know. Those who recognize that there is no ultimate solution to be found do not freeze in the delusion and paralysis of illusory and supposed certainties, but continue on a mindful search. People are sustained by the connection of their felt identity and plausibility, which is why truly sustainable learning can only succeed if learners can be moved to dense emotional processes of feeling, self-awareness, and self-transformation. The transformation and maturation of competences thus does not require a didacticization, but the emotionalization of what one learns.

Conclusion

Especially in disruptive situations, people use the survival mechanism of human cognition to grasp the new with the help of old and established patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting. Initially, they evaluate new possibilities through the lens of the familiar. To some extent, our society is repeatedly threatened by a continuity trap that leads us, even if not intentionally, to believe that everything can and will strictly conserve the way it has always been. Caught in this trap, we are always busy tackling and trying to solve the problems of the future with the same ways of thinking that created these problems in the first place. Only through awareness can the continuity trap be broken.

For an epistemological culture of learning and cooperation in organizations and companies to be developed, an understanding of the circularity, constructiveness, and relativity of one's own perception is essential. A *reflexible attitude* on the part of employees and managers makes it possible to recognize and transform interdependencies. As a result, the share of communication about these processes of transformation also grows in those areas of society whose self-image has so far been more technological. This is accompanied by a cultural break that places new demands not only on the managers involved, but also on professionals and experts.

In order to move forward toward an epistemological learning culture and a self-included professionalism and to design awareness-based system change, we have emphasized the following elements in this paper:

- Education is much more than the accumulation of knowledge and skills. It is first and foremost the targeted promotion of the individual's abilities to reflect and be flexible in dealing with new kinds of demands and solving new kinds of problems. Its guiding principle is the reflexible person.
- Developing education systems requires the targeted development and promotion of the self-education and self-change capacities of the responsible actors. The focus here is on transforming their established certainties (e.g., "Rethink education as competence development!") and strengthening their ability to resonate. The focus is not on teaching and instruction, but on enabling self-organized identity and competence development.
- Education systems must redesign the content of their curriculum and how they present it: It is less about equipping learners with traditional knowledge, skills and abilities than about helping learners develop their personalities and awareness in ways that enable them to adjust their attitudes toward themselves and the world.

- The article identifies the key competences for such change. Using the example of “Meditation for Learners: My life is (also) daily focus work” in Figure 2, it demonstrates how these competences can be self-taught.

These self-competences strengthen the ability of responsible actors to deal with their patterns of thinking and feeling. This ability can help them to think *fresh* (Scharmer, 2009); they can detach from their own biographical imprints and perhaps even reinvent themselves. Free from the whisperings of emotional regimes, time slots, and coaching, individuals have the opportunity to understand themselves as well as the new world and to practice new forms of interaction. In this sense, school, university, and vocational training programs need to become places for reflexive and transformative personal development.

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Peer-Reviewed Article

The New Paradigm Is Already Here:

The Practicing of Prototypes of Future through Vertical Alignment

Kirsi Hakio

Aalto University

kirsi.hakio@aalto.fi

Abstract

This paper examines how abstract concepts of alignment, such as moving between different levels of attention, were rendered visible and concrete in a nature-tourism context. The case study is a project designed to construct a prototype of a possible future culture rooted in care and awareness-based co-creation. To support the concept of vertical alignment, the paper includes an introduction to the literature on care ethics and tangible perspectives on the connections and relationships between self, others, and the larger whole. The research findings are examined through the analytical lenses generated during the research process with the idea of following how the internal abilities related to moving between different levels of attention influenced the formation of the visible outcomes and thus the emergence of the new. In light of the current global pressures for change toward human and planetary sustainability and the capacity-building needs emphasizing new inner postures and abilities to act from broader ecosystem awareness, the paper provides real-world examples of what

new ways of becoming with the world could look like in practice, as everyday activities and choices.

Keywords

prototypes of future; vertical alignment; capacity building; care ethics; case study

Introduction

Humanity has reached a point where, if we are to co-create sustainable futures in which all beings can flourish, we will need new mindsets and internal postures to face the challenges before us, navigate uncertainty together, and move forward collectively (Haraway, 2016; Irwin, 2015; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). A recent paper for UNESCO's Futures of Education initiative highlights building that capacity for "learning to become with the world," coupled with developing capabilities to "imagine alternative ways of living with the Earth." Both will be critical for our continued survival (UNESCO, 2020). Many authors have argued that such a transformation in our mindset and posture of being in the world requires a radical paradigm shift (UNESCO, 2020; Irwin, 2015; Scharmer, 2016; Tronto, 2013; du Plessis, 2015).

Shifting individual-level and collective postures and mindsets toward more aware and sustainable ways of being and becoming has been the focus of the work of Otto Scharmer and his colleagues for decades (Senge et al., 2004). As a result of those collaborations, Scharmer has developed an approach to awareness-based systems change, Theory U, which provides a transformation framework, process, and practical tools for bringing about such change (Scharmer, 2016; 2018). Theory U is grounded in the view that form follows consciousness, meaning that the interior condition of individuals in a social system, the source condition, determines the quality of people's actions, and thus gives rise to and co-shapes how the visible outcomes and practical results of that system unfold (Scharmer, 2018, p. 16; Scharmer, 2016, p. 94; Scharmer & Pomeroy, 2019). Thus the process of Theory U focuses specifically on this source condition and teaches participants to transform perception, transform self and will, and transform action (Jaworski et al., 2004). These transformations entail adopting new inner postures and consciousness, through which people practice alternative ways to listen, see, and sense themselves, along with new ways to interact with others and the world.¹ Through this process the participants gain the ability to act from the inner wisdom that arises from the natural, innate connectedness to the larger whole (the ecosystem, the Earth, and the sources of life). These thoughts on the larger whole are discussed in more detail in the next section.

¹ For details about the aims, processes, and tools of Theory U, see Scharmer's work (2016, 2018) and the Presencing Institute web page: <https://www.presencing.org/aboutus/theory-u>.

One key element of the transformation journey provided by Theory U is to increase vertical alignment abilities and capacity.

Vertical alignment is about moving between different levels of attention. It is a way of accessing one's personal experience and then exploring it from distinct perspectives (Scharmer & Pomeroy, 2019). The "inner movement" of vertical alignment is related to Scharmer's definition of *vertical literacy* (2020, 2019) as the capacity to connect with the knowing that arises from deeper levels of consciousness (Scharmer & Pomeroy, 2019). Building on the idea that form follows consciousness, vertical literacy highlights how modern education needs to pay attention to capacity building that focuses on people's ability to operate from the sources of social action, individually and collectively (Scharmer, 2019)—in other words, moving from habitual awareness to more relational and empathic viewpoints, and eventually into a generative state of ecosystem awareness where it is possible to sense and actualize future potentials (Scharmer, 2018, pp. 36–39). Thus the inner movement between different levels of attention that takes place in practicing vertical alignment can be seen as a vehicle that helps put into practice these ideas of vertical literacy.² Here, vertical alignment is defined as a three-step-movement that teaches people how to (1) enhance their ability to align their actions with their inner wisdom, (2) extend that alignment to others in the ecosystem, and (3) ultimately align with the larger whole. These aims of vertical alignment and principles of vertical literacy respond to the needs that UNESCO outlined for learning new ways to be and become with the world and our planet.

While Theory U provides a framework and tools for building vertical literacy (Scharmer, 2019; 2020, p. 7), there has been little research into what the related alignment abilities and capacity might mean in practice (e.g., as part of research and development processes). This paper contributes to this gap by presenting a case study in which practices of moving between different levels of attention were part of a development project in the context of nature tourism; its goal was to develop a new work and service culture based on co-creation and care. These intentions were seen as a way to devise and explore ideas for a prototype of a possible future culture (see Manzini, 2015) and thus experiment with alternative ways of becoming with the world. Inspired by the ideas of Theory U—specifically, that form follows consciousness and vertical literacy—the guiding question for this paper is:

How do the internal abilities related to moving between different levels of attention, such as being aware of one's own awareness and shifting one's lenses of perception, affect the formation of visible outcomes, actions, and practices, and thus the emergence of the new?

² For more information on vertical literacy, see the Matrix of Social Evolution (Scharmer, 2018, pp. 36–37) and the map of Four Stages of Systems Evolution (Scharmer, 2019).

To anchor the study, I begin by introducing the literature on care ethics. The field of care ethics offers an opportunity to view the world beyond human-centered and market-driven thinking and paradigms. It supports the practice of vertical alignment by providing tangible perspectives on the connections and relationships between self, others, and the larger whole. I then present a case study for which research material was collected and analyzed using a constructive design research approach. The research findings are then presented through the analytical lenses generated in the process, which highlight the contribution of this paper: real-world examples of what abstract concepts like vertical alignment, moving between different levels of attention, and new ways of becoming with the world could look like. After this discussion, the research findings are discussed in light of the capacity-building needs outlined above and in connection with creating prototypes of possible futures as a means of responding to the current global pressure for change toward human and planetary sustainability.

Grounding in the Literature

This section offers a brief introduction to care ethics and how it relates to the concept of vertical alignment and the practice of its three-step-movement.

Care as a Ubiquitous and Unavoidable Force of Life

The care ethics field provides an opportunity to look at our relationships with and attitudes toward ourselves and others—people, non-humans, nature, and the Earth (see, e.g., Puig de la Bellacasa, 2010, 2017). Like the essence of vertical alignment described above, care ethics entails engaging in a three-step movement between different levels of attention. These can be, for example, perception of the self, of the surrounding context, and of a broader life-sustaining whole.

Perception of the Self

According to the principles of care ethics, a worldview based on individualism and detachment is an illusion. Human beings are always dependent on others; care is both given and received, even if it goes unnoticed (Hankivsky, 2004; Mol, 2008; Tronto, 2013). However, the event of care (such as that perceived in caregiving) is not always a direct interaction between two parties; rather, it is a movement that returns to the giver in various forms (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2010; Tronto, 1993, 2013). In modern Western societies individuals often think of themselves as autonomous, even though many no longer cultivate their own food, sew their own clothes, bury their own dead, etc. (Mol, 2008, p. 4). Such silent dependency on others can be easily overlooked unless it is specifically pointed out. Through the concept of care ethics, it becomes possible to reconsider this distorted perception of oneself and one's connections with the rest of the world.

Interconnections with Non-Human Worlds

The themes of individuality and detachment come to the fore more broadly in discussions of interconnectedness and relationships between human beings and nature (see, e.g., Puig de la Bellacasa, 2010, 2017; Zylstra et al., 2014). These are easily understood concepts in the abstract; when embodied in person, however, they yield eye-opening experiences—for instance, in wilderness experiences (Aaltola, 2015) or ecological self-practices as experiences of deep interconnectedness with all life (Macy & Brown, 2014). Western societies and lifestyles are built in a way that masks people's interconnectedness and dependency on non-humans (Zylstra et al., 2014). For example, we cannot generate the substances needed for physiological survival without natural systems and the elements they are composed of, such as fresh water and oxygen. Puig de la Bellacasa (2010) demonstrates the translation of her take on care ethics into tangible form through the everyday practices of permaculture, where care of Earth and care of people go hand in hand. Viewing these practices of permaculture as actions of care that transform the way in which we feel, think, and engage, she describes how individual practices are closely related to collective ones. In the context, care can be seen as an act that creates relations among humans, non-humans, and the Earth, thus creating relationality (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2010, p. 164).

The Life-Sustaining Larger Whole

Finally, when one considers alignment and connectedness to a broader life-sustaining source, care can be seen as a phenomenon without which there would be no life. From this perspective, care is present in every movement, action, and interaction; the biosphere would not exist without an all-encompassing, ongoing cycle of care. Joan Tronto defines this essentiality of care as “a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible.” This interconnected world “includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web” (Tronto, 1993, p. 103). This take on care goes beyond questions of giving or receiving it, even beyond viewing care as a movement that returns to its giver in various forms. It proceeds from the premise that humans and non-humans are not competitors but cohabitants who coexist with the ecosystem and are highly dependent on recognition and appreciation for the other. Since care is present wherever there is life, it is ubiquitous in a profound sense (Yeandle et al., 2017) and unavoidable (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012).

Care and Alignment Practices

Aligning with such an all-encompassing, life-sustaining web and whole requires of its experiencer a shift of internal mindset and posture, along with the capacity to connect with the knowing that flows from deeper levels of consciousness (see

Scharmer & Pomeroy, 2019). Joseph Jaworski's research on synchronicity (2011) usefully describes such a shift of awareness in more detail and can serve here to complement the views expressed in the care ethics literature. He uses language such as "choice," "belief," and "strong personal sense" to describe the inner posture upon which access to tacit knowledge of "vital forces that are larger than our selves" (Jaworski, 2011, p. 88) is based. Hence, accessing deeper knowing about phenomena such as care is not a rational process of observing the visible world but a worldview, and it involves a deep personal belief that "there is an underlying intelligence within the universe" (Jaworski, 2011, p. x). Practicing such alignment requires surrender and trust also, where the former refers to an act of opening oneself to experiencing care in its diverse forms. Many have highlighted how an inner state of surrender and open will are keys to experiencing phenomena that are invisible to the eye (e.g., Jaworski, 2011; Scharmer, 2016; Akama, 2018; Macy and Brown, 2014). The case study presented here reveals a fuller picture of how such experiences of surrendering and alignment may look in practice.

Before delving into it, however, I want to emphasize that it is a *choice* to perceive the world through the lenses of care ethics or to engage in a movement between different levels of attention. Only by building our capacity for self-awareness can we access this choice, as Dayna Cunningham (2018) has pointed out:

Every moment is a crossroad—or parting of the ways—leading to a choice. The question is [whether we are] aware of the moment of choice happening inside us, as well as the tone and nature of our mindset when making the choice. These are basic principles of self-awareness and consciousness of being present in a moment.

When considering new ways of becoming with the world or acting from an evolved inner posture, building the capacity to identify these moments of internal choice is central.

Case Study

The case study's setting was the nature-tourism destination Elisaari. An island on the archipelago of southern Finland, Elisaari is partly a nature reserve and is owned by the City of Helsinki. Running a nature-tourism business here, a local entrepreneur couple work as custodians of this destination with the freedom to develop the area as they wish. In addition to various nature-tourism services, they offer services for boaters and accommodations, as well as facilities for retreats, camps, and training. They hire outside help in the form of seasonal workers in the summer peak season, but otherwise they look after the facility themselves.

The starting point for the collaboration between this couple (hereinafter referred to as entrepreneur S and entrepreneur P) and a design researcher (the author) was a shared interest in awareness-based transformation, experimental

and co-creative development approaches, and the prototyping of alternative future paradigms. The initial intention of the project, which began in late 2016, was to carry out small-scale experiments using new ideas developed with the local community to prototype a new future work and service culture—one grounded in care and awareness-based co-creation, encompassing nature and all non-humans. To support this, the entrepreneurs set specific guiding values as a jumping-off point for the collaboration process: discovering nature, compassionate living, welcoming others, creating beauty, developing “heart intelligence,” new ways of working with money, developing awareness / inner work, co-creation, artistic expression, and working with rhythms (of life). Later, in 2017, the project’s scope expanded to establishing a community around these ideas; the entrepreneurs had long-term ambitious visions and dreams of building a new local center for education where a paradigm of care and awareness-based co-creation could be studied and practiced. In this context, a central development influencing the project was the unexpected sale of a nearby old village school, which the entrepreneurs acquired, renovated, and expanded in 2017–2018. In line with the guiding values and intention, the school was named Villa Sofia, to represent “a house of wisdom, allowing the inner wisdom of the co-creators to be refined into wise deeds” (Villa Sofia Facebook page, March 2019).

The Research Approach and Collection of Data

The research approach is grounded in constructive design research (Koskinen et al., 2011), which is based on constructing knowledge in and through a design process. The emphasis is on tangible and embodied practices of making, experimenting, and prototyping in parallel with reflective conversation with the people involved about the context and the materials to be used (see Eriksen, 2012; Schön, 1983). The process was also influenced by Theory U, incorporating a framework of five movements: co-initiating, co-sensing, presencing, co-creating, and co-evolving (Scharmer 2016, 2018) (figure 1). This awareness-based approach was used in encounters and workshops to promote alignment and connecting to self and to the essence of the present moment. Thus presencing is positioned in the process diagram as a major steering and supporting element for the entire process.

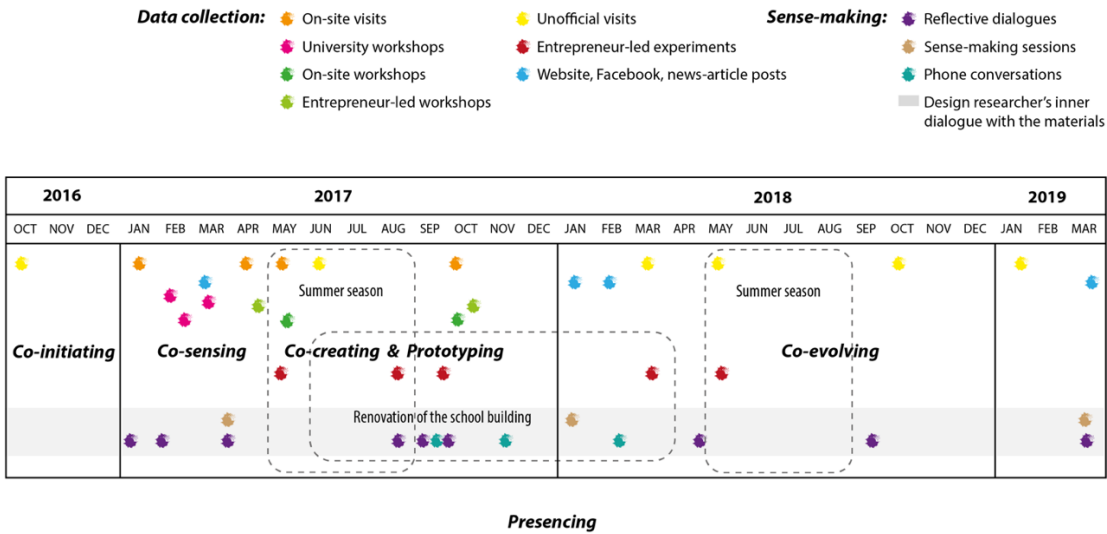


Figure 1: Illustration of the process's overall structure, along with its data-collection and sense-making steps.

Research was conducted for more than two years. This paper looks in particular at the prototyping stage and how movement between the different levels of attention manifested itself in the process of co-creating the new culture. Thus the scope of this paper is limited accordingly; however, the reader may benefit from a broader picture, so Annex provides details about the whole data-collection and sense-making process: who was involved and the purpose, outcome, and impact of each activity.

Formation of the Analytical Lenses

As Figure 1 and Annex show, the process yielded multivalent data and other information, as is typical of constructive design research. To facilitate synthesis and broader understanding, the information was analyzed by categorizing and grouping its various elements both physically and digitally (figure 2).

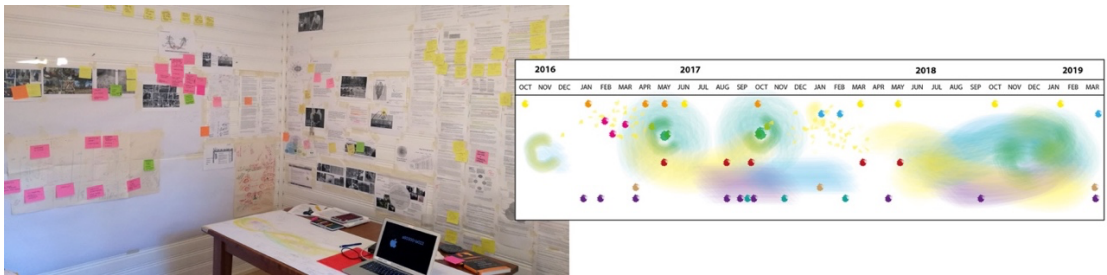


Figure 2: The varied and ambiguous material collected was analyzed by grouping elements on a wall (at left) and through visualization cycles (both hand-drawn and digital).

Such categorization activities are not purely intellectual ways of analyzing the data in a systematic manner. As Halse and colleagues have pointed out, this type of analysis calls for “attention to the practitioners’ own creative being in the situation” and “a full-bodied, environmentally and socially dependent process

expressed in actions as well as words” (Halse et al., 2010, p. 148). Throughout the process, the design researcher engaged in reflective dialogue and a joint sense-making process with the entrepreneurs to create meaning together. (See Figure 1 timeline and Annex.) The dialogical approach shaped the design researcher’s own analysis and synthesis, as well as her inner dialogue with the materials, thus helping to keep the process relevant for the local partners and the community (Krogh & Koskinen, 2020).

Crucial insights emerged in 2019 when the design researcher saw connections between the literature on care ethics and vertical alignment practices (conducted in the workshops, see Annex), and a multilayered visualization of the essence of the island made by entrepreneur S. In March 2017, entrepreneur S had placed a sheet of translucent baking paper atop a drawing in which she had created a map of the island and its nature-tourism services. The baking paper depicted a second map, informed by her background in Rudolf Steiner’s anthroposophy. The map showed tree species growing on the island and their differences in tone, essence, and meaning, including more spiritual aspects (figure 3). The two layers represent different worldviews and perceptions of reality; each can be perceived and experienced in accordance with how the perceiver/experiencer is oriented to viewing lived experience. In other words, they require the perceiver/experiencer to use different levels of attention.



Figure 3: The original drawing by entrepreneur S in 2017 (left); the design researcher's follow-up visualizations of a multi-layered reality experience in 2019 (right). These became the underpinnings of the analytical lenses.

These insights triggered the idea of exploring and arranging miscellaneous materials and information through different experiential layers, corresponding to the three-step movement of vertical alignment and the three distinct ways of perceiving and experiencing oneself and the world as articulated by scholars of care ethics. By combining the two perspectives, the design researcher identified common themes for the analytical lenses (figure 4).

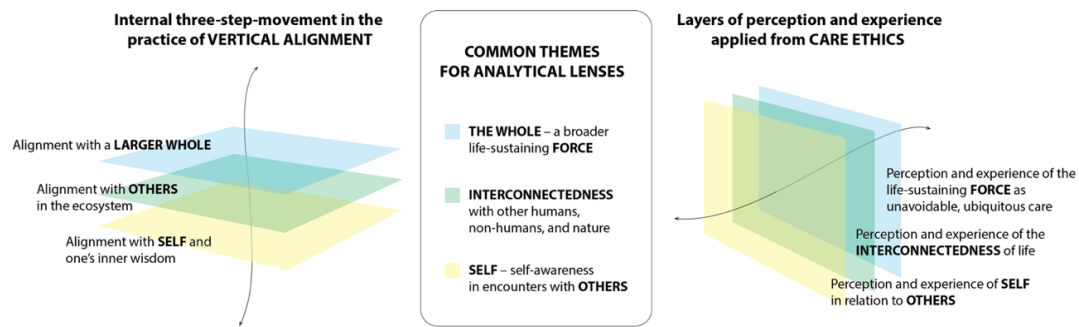


Figure 4: Analytical lenses for exploring the research findings through movements between three levels of attention: the alignment with self-awareness in encounters, the alignment with interconnected perspectives, and the alignment with the larger whole.

The following three sections address the findings as viewed through the three analytical lenses and highlight how exercising internal movement across the corresponding levels of attention was manifested in the project and the process of co-creating the new culture. Therefore each section also attests to how the project’s intention and guiding values were translated into practices and outcomes.

The First Lens: Everyday Encounters

This section presents the main findings of how alignment with self was manifested in everyday encounters (figure 5). These findings relate to the entrepreneur couple’s personal experiences, to workshop practices with local stakeholders, and to the seasonal employee recruitment process and its outcomes. Since more detailed descriptions of the last two have already been presented elsewhere (see Hakio and Mattelmäki 2019), they are discussed here only briefly.

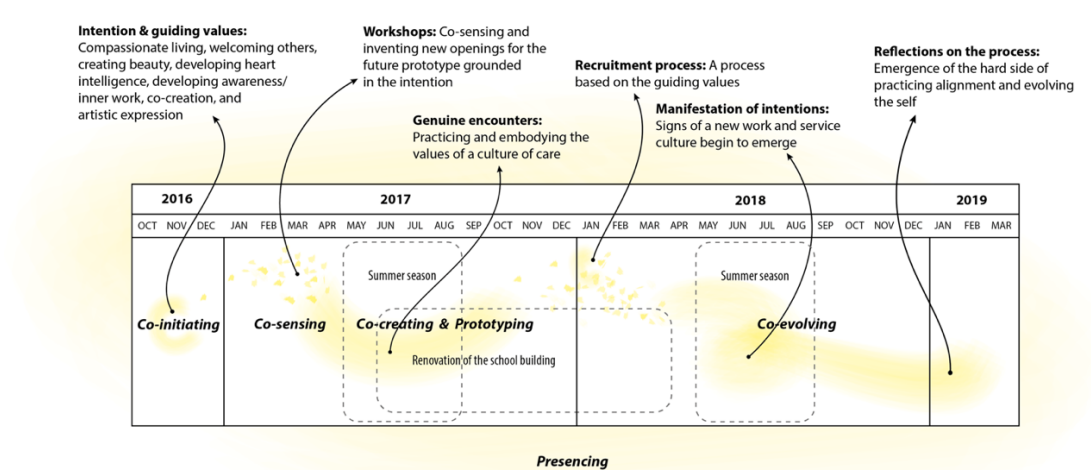


Figure 5: Illustration of the main findings related to the theme of everyday encounters.

The workshops took place at the beginning of the project in 2017 (figure 1, also Annex and university workshops), when 30 local stakeholders gathered together with the entrepreneurs to co-sense and conceive new openings for service concepts and collaboration. In all the workshops, a self-awareness element was embedded in the exercises. The aim of these exercises was to establish favorable conditions for fruitful encounters and discussions among the participants by asking them to first focus on “scanning” their inner state of being and thereby becoming aware of their own internal posture toward the groupwork. This alignment with oneself was practiced, for example, through mindfulness exercises and experimental visual tools. As a result of the search for new openings, one of the themes raised was the idea of a “unifying encounter” both between people and with nature, which was repeated in all of the ideas produced in the workshops. (See Annex and entrepreneur-led experiments.)

One example of how these unifying encounters occurred later can be found in an experiment conducted in 2018 to reform the island’s annual recruitment process for seasonal employees. In a nutshell, the entrepreneurs wanted to give the new employees space to interpret, embrace, and implement the guiding values of the place as they wished. This co-creative approach allowed the employees to self-direct and realize their own internal visions, and thus manifest a caring work and service culture in various forms (see Hakio & Mattelmäki 2019). The impacts of the practices and atmosphere created by the employees were experienced by the customers, which in turn generated a lot of positive customer feedback during the season.

The following findings are based on the design researcher's observations of the entrepreneurial couple's activities at different stages of the project, as well as their own accounts of their experiences. Both entrepreneurs were already inherently embodying the co-creative and caring culture they envisioned in their interactions with customers, partners, and employees. This culture was particularly visible at mealtimes: all site visits and the field notes attest that it is customary for the entrepreneurs and the facility to invite all those who are present, be they employees, renovation workers, and even occasional visitors, to take their meals at the same table. This practice led to gatherings where work matters and current burning issues were sometimes discussed, but also to discussions about people’s own lives and life paths. This atmosphere of openness and mutual encounters, in which one person is genuinely seen and heard by others, naturally extended to how people worked together. This approach yielded encouraging results. For instance, observations from all of the visits during the renovation of Villa Sofia revealed that the site’s personnel and renovators exhibited flexibility and willingness to resolve challenging situations related to the renovation work together (figure 1).

Entrepreneur S personally experienced these sometimes very small gestures of pausing together for a moment and sharing coffee or eating together as “a means of empowering both the individual and the community,” according to comments from the August 2017 reflective-dialogue session. Entrepreneur P

extended this idea, reflecting on the service and work culture that the two want to foster in a broader sense by analogy to a service-design approach:

The existing services are being built like a theatrical set. There is a structure that guides you, saying, “When you act like this, you are safe.” But what should happen to make you feel like you are not working in such scenery, producing services and experiences in accordance with the service instructions? Here, the encounter takes place on an equal footing without service instructions. Just a real, genuine encounter.

Although these examples of unifying and genuine encounters do not directly indicate the ability of those involved to align with themselves in those encounters, they do provide valuable insights for manifesting a co-creative and caring culture, and thus prototyping alternative ways of becoming. In particular, they emphasize encounters in which the internal posture of the people involved—in other words, the source conditions—indicates appreciation and respect for each other. However, the last two examples are directly linked to alignment with self (and practicing self-awareness) in encounters.

Entrepreneur S reported on her encounters with clients by practicing the internal movement of self-awareness in summer 2017. She spoke about how she had faced three angry customers, each dissatisfied in his or her own way. She detailed how, after peaceful resolution of the situation with the customer, each situation gradually became less threatening, eventually ending well, either at that moment or the next day. She then reflected upon the experience, noting that it took courage to engage face-to-face with these clients, who were either drunk or otherwise in a highly agitated state.

I was taught that if I stay in my own center and face the other without fear and without letting any of my internal triggers react, so that I won’t escape or attack, then we are able to have a genuine encounter with whomever. It worked with the drunk too: I looked him in the eyes the whole time. I recognized a change in myself. I have worked with myself. When you stay aligned in your own center, such [an] encounter arises. (Reflective-dialogue session, September 2018)

Later, in 2019, she reflected on her experience with social entrepreneurship. During the process of renovating Villa Sofia, she had encountered similar opportunities for practicing alignment when working with marginalized young people and in apprenticeship relations:

There are always situations where you just want to stop and throw your gloves on the counter, when the shadows of social entrepreneurship emerge and you feel like there is not balance in the giving and receiving. Developing intelligence of the heart seems to be the clearest, visible work that is offered to us as humanity in this time. But it has been noticed here how it is not

philosophical contemplative work but, rather, quite raw and cruel work! (Reflective-dialogue session, March 2019)

Her experiences reveal that each moment carries an opportunity to choose one's quality of becoming and one's way of developing heart intelligence, echoing Dayna Cunningham's words above. They also describe times when challenges or disruption arise, and point out the difficult side of practicing alignment with oneself and others.

The Second Lens: A State of Interconnectedness

Since the context of the case study was nature tourism, nature was a key factor in all the activities at the location. The purpose of the analysis was to identify moments, experiences, and manifestations of the guiding values related to the state of interconnectedness and to describe what it might mean to perceive and experience reality through this lens (figure 6).

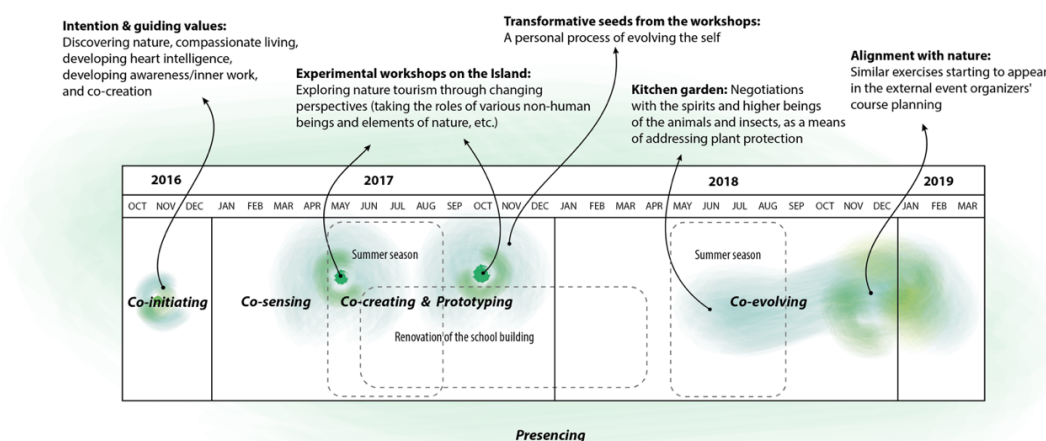


Figure 6: Illustration of the main findings related to the theme of interconnectedness.

An example can be found in one small, nearly imperceptible gesture by the entrepreneurs to protect the plants in their kitchen garden. They noted at the reflective-dialogue sessions of August 2017 and March 2019 that, instead of using pesticides, they communicate with the insects and other animals on so-called internal levels and talk with them (figure 7). Similarly to how the Runa people of the Amazon (Kohn, 2013) spoke to the spirit and higher being of a jaguar pilfering the villagers' food, they engaged in discussions with the spirits of deer and snails on the island about where to obtain food and who needs what. These conversations, which have their roots in the entrepreneurs' life-centered and anthroposophic worldview, sometimes took the form of meditation, and sometimes involved simply talking to the beings. The core idea is not new in the history of our planet; a similar worldview and conception of reality—in which all living things are seen as connected to the same life energy and experience of

living—can be found in indigenous cultures, past civilizations, and philosophical ideas.³



Figure 7: The kitchen garden locations near the island's main building and later at Villa Sofia. "Negotiations" with the spirits of the animals took place in both places through meditation and conversation.

Switching perspective and gaining a broader awareness of interconnectedness were deliberately explored, particularly at the on-site workshop in October 2017, where nature tourism was examined from the perspectives of non-humans and nature. In this workshop with 16 participants, manmade nature-tourism services were challenged through alignment and role-playing exercises. Some of the participants played the part of nature tourists, while others—to the best of their ability—took on the role of local animals, a protected oak tree, or a plant. In addition, some played a nature spirit, a boulder, or a figure from the history of the island. This activity brought a completely different time scale and perspective, as well as a holistic approach, to the exercise. Since the study was exploratory and followed a learning-by-doing ethos, and because the emphasis on synthesis between findings from the care ethics literature and vertical alignment practices emerged only as the process progressed, the long-term experiences of participants were not systematically followed. That said, some of their immediate reflections on alignment experiences are reported on in Annex and addressed in more detail in a separate publication, on the co-creation phases of the case study (Hakio & Mattelmäki, 2019). However, consistent with Puig de la Bellacasa's arguments (2010) on seeing permaculture as a seed that eventually, through hands-on practices and personal

³ In Eastern traditions such as Shinto, nature is seen sacred. The sun, the stars, the rocks, the animals, and all creatures on Earth, including humans, are seen as "one." E.g., Thomas Kasulis's study of Japanese philosophy has delved into these topics (introduced in Akama, 2012).

According to the ancient Greek worldview, all living things — humans, animals, and plants — have a soul. In one of Plato's dialogues, Timaios (30b,c,d), he explains that Cosmos is a living creature of which all other living creatures, severally and generically, are a part. The philosophical theory of panpsychism also holds that consciousness is a fundamental and ubiquitous quality of the world. Simply put, contrary to the mechanistic worldview, the world is awake (Seager 2020).

engagement, generates transformation, a seed of change was sown at this workshop—a seed that later began to germinate within entrepreneur S as an intimate, inner experience of connection with nature. At one of the later reflection discussions, in September 2018, she shared how these experiments had begun to live in her, in a process of personal evolution. As with the peeling of an onion, ever newer and deeper insights and levels of experience kept opening in her connection with nature and in her way of being as a part of the whole.

Musing on this kind of self-development through nature experiences more generally, she stated at the March 2019 reflective-dialogue session that she had noticed how almost every course organizer arriving at Villa Sofia had adopted similar approaches to connecting with nature as a part of the relevant course program, be it through drumming, walking in nature, making art, or exercising mindfulness in the woods. The following extract from a social-media post by one course organizer is illustrative:

Some pictures from a conscious moment in the forest during our co-created exploration in Villa Sofia. Sensing the environment in silence, the wind sweeping through my being, hanging on the branches, finding a safe space inside the green inviting the sun to my face. Finally laying down in the snow to watch the sky. Funny how I still feel the memory in my body. It just did so good to me. The others felt the same, our journeys provided important insight. Nature teaches us. (Facebook post, March 24, 2019)

Many additional examples could be cited that indicate how the intention of prototyping a new future culture, including new ways of being and becoming with the world, had begun to live its own life in those who had co-created it and in those who came to experience it.

The Third Lens: Life-Sustaining Force

The final lens is grounded in a worldview and perception of reality wherein life is seen as based on an all-encompassing supportive source that maintains living connections among all lifeforms. Figure 8 illustrates how the findings related to this lens are positioned on the project timeline.

Again, early care ethics literature articulates central themes for purposes of this lens well—trust and surrendering as a form of letting go—for example, letting go of fear and control. The process of renovating Villa Sofia offers an excellent example of how these themes became visible. When the local school building was put up for sale unexpectedly, the entrepreneurs knew that any efforts to find sufficient financial resources would have to start from scratch; however, they decided that purchasing the building made sense because it dovetailed with their vision of creating a physical center where their goal of studying and practicing a new paradigm based on care and awareness-based co-creation could be realized. Although various business solutions and support

funding eventually materialized, the whole renovation process required the entrepreneurs to exercise tremendous and constant trust.

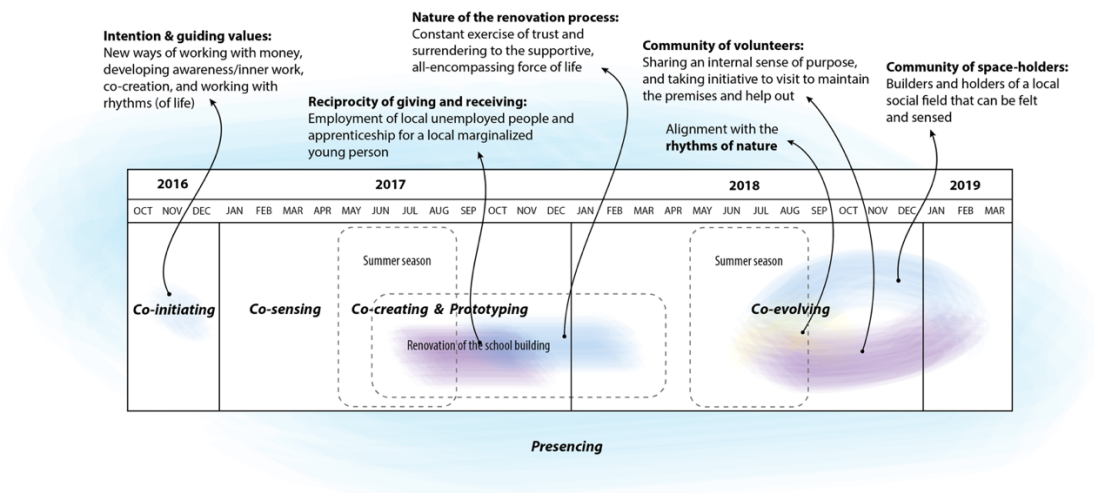


Figure 8: Illustration of the main findings related to the theme of surrendering to the all-encompassing supportive and life-sustaining force.

With a mechanistic worldview, these events could be read as coincidences. However, they can also be interpreted by looking at synchronicities. Jaworski describes these moments as events wherein things come together unexpectedly, in an uncontrolled and almost unbelievable way, and he cites C. G. Jung's definition of the term "synchronicity," which refers to "a meaningful coincidence of two or more events, where something other than the probability of chance is involved" (Jaworski, 2011, p. xi). At the September 2018 reflective-dialogue session, both entrepreneurs pointed out that their way of doing things, might, from the standpoint of the prevailing market-driven paradigm, seem adventurous, unprofitable, and at times even reckless, but they emphasized also that their decisions were based on an unshakable inner trust in the supportive nature of life, as well as on their personal beliefs, choices, and abilities to align with a larger whole.

Entrepreneur S reflected that in the renovation process, "even if it is made a bit like a jigsaw puzzle, [and] there might not always be enough supplies, or there are no materials, we always start from the premise of what is beautiful" (reflective-dialogue session, March 2019). In addition, both entrepreneurs noted that, in the end, building materials had always been found in a suitable quantity or were even obtained at no cost because they were someone else's surplus goods. They also remarked that suitable renovators appeared in their life whenever needed. And in accordance with the synchronicities of life, reciprocity was achieved in these encounters, enabling them to hire local unemployed people and educate one local marginalized young person in a new profession, through apprenticeship, in the course of the renovation process.

In line with the intention for the project, to build a community, a community of like-minded people indeed began to emerge and gather at Villa Sofia in 2018.

One group consisted of “volunteers” who had found their way to the location through the guidance of their “internal sense of purpose.” This group included women who wanted to spend time at Villa Sofia and help to maintain the facilities by, for example, doing the laundry and cleaning windows (figure 9). Another group, which could be characterized as “space-holders,” included several individuals who often gathered in tandem with the rhythms of nature to celebrate the autumnal and vernal equinoxes.



Figure 9: A volunteer helping with the laundry at Villa Sofia (left); Villa Sofia's hall, after the meeting of the space-holders group (right).

Because the members of this group regularly gathered in Villa Sofia's main hall, one influence on the local social field and the location's atmosphere became evident.⁴ Entrepreneur S described feedback from customers reporting special, uplifting experiences and sensations connected with the destination and its atmosphere. Accordingly, she experienced the gatherings of this group as constituent of and contributing to a “local group consciousness” (reflective-dialogue session, March 2019). She said of the social field that it “gathers the spirit and tone of the work done with the site and influences people who come here. It is a source from which they can draw.” Entrepreneur S was not alone in these ideas. One way to describe the phenomenon of social fields and co-construction of an atmosphere that can be sensed by others is to view it through the lens of similar reports. Jaworski (2011) has cited people's similarly uplifting experiences at other places regarded as special, such as Chartres Cathedral. In the context of this paper, such activities can be viewed as a conscious exercise of using different levels of attention to sense and bring to life a local social field. As

⁴ See “cultivation of social fields” in Scharmer 2018 (p.14-15). In this context the idea of local social fields has connections to holding practices and experiences of working in a circle; see description of the Circle of Seven in Scharmer 2016 (pp. 151–155 and 175–179).

characterized by Scharmer and Pomeroy (2019), social fields carry tones and qualities that reflect the tones and qualities of the inner dimension of the people who created them.

Discussion and Conclusions

This paper examines what new ways of becoming with the world while also exploring alternative ways of living with the Earth (see UNESCO, 2020) might look like in practice. The guiding question here is how the inner abilities of moving between different levels of attention affect the formation of the visible outcomes—actions and practices—and thus the emergence of the new. The question is inspired by the idea that form follows consciousness (Scharmer, 2018, 2016); in other words, the source conditions of individuals in social systems determine the qualities of people's actions and thereby the practical results of that system. This paper is focused in particular on following how the intention of the case study and the aim of prototyping a new future work and service culture grounded in care and awareness-based co-creation emerged in various forms. The analytical lenses generated by the constructive design research process provided an opportunity to map where the inner movement between levels of attention manifested itself in the process.

One finding is that people can develop the ability to practice vertical alignment in encounters with others, both humans and non-humans. More specifically, they are able to align with the inner posture of heart intelligence in encounters with customers and co-workers, and thus pay attention to how events and atmospheres unfold in the work and service cultures. Another finding is linked to the second analytical lens, the state of interconnectedness as described in the alignment practices associated with plant protection and the development of nature tourism services. These activities reflect the quality of the source conditions of the people involved, including the entrepreneurs, but also of the workshop participants. The effects of such alignment practices and how they can transition and influence other activities in the new culture were observed—for example, one course organizer reported experiences of alignment with nature during the course's activities. Similar visible manifestations of internal postures of trust and surrender were observed in the unfolding of the renovation process of Villa Sofia.

Some of the research findings describe the ability to move between different levels of attention in encounters, while others describe the application of the alignment practices in a workshop context. Some findings describe how the intention and guiding values of the case study became apparent in later stages of the process. The recruitment process and the emergence of a community are such examples and reflect the internal postures of the people involved and the way they operated from those postures. Customer feedback in both cases can be seen as a visible outcome of their activities and the collective source conditions.

The main contribution of this paper is to show how abstract concepts of alignment, such as moving between different levels of attention, were rendered

visible and concrete in a case study context. The literature on care ethics was introduced to support the alignment and capacity-building concepts provided by Theory U. By laying out a real-world application that concretizes what such alignment with oneself, others, and the Earth could mean in practice, this paper addresses the identified research gap in empirical applications and complements the discussion in those fields' literature. Therefore, future projects undertaken in various disciplines interested in awareness-based transformation might find inspiration from the discussion and empirical stories presented here.

The current global pressure for change toward human and planetary sustainability requires a wide range of experiments and the creation of prototypes that gather information on how humanity can move toward flourishing and life-affirming futures. When we consider these prototypes of possible futures, even the more radical experiences and perspectives described through the analytical lenses—such as alignment with supportive life forces, synchronicities, social fields, or local group consciousness—should not be dismissed as too esoteric or mystical. On the contrary, they ought to be treated as inspirational opportunities to ask new questions so as to inform the next versions of the prototype (see Manzini, 2015). One might ask, for example, how can the culture, worldviews, and inner mindset and posture described in the existing prototype be further explored and made more accessible to a wider audience, and, thereby, more readily accepted in different contexts? Likewise, how could we move toward a state of greater pluralism, where, for instance, nurturing an ability to speak to the spirits of animals, building a capacity for heart intelligence, and exploring life forces that are larger than ourselves are seen as potential routes to solving problems? These are beneficial questions for future projects and further research.

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Annex

Elisaari project (10/2016–3/2019)

ACTIVITY	METHOD	DATA/MATERIAL	STAKEHOLDERS	OUTCOMES & IMPACT
Four on-site visits for contextual studies	Exploratory fieldwork with observations, conversations, and sensing of the space	Field notes Photos Video recordings	The island, nature, non-humans Entrepreneur couple (Seasonal) employees and renovators Visitors One or two design researchers	Research material for the workshops and sense-making, as well as for overall understanding
Six unofficial visits	Spending time in the place	Field notes Photos	One design researcher The island, nature, non-humans, and the entrepreneur couple Visitors	Personal experience of the place and a contribution to overall understanding
Three workshops held at university premises for co-creating new openings for the business and for local collaboration Research motivation: experimenting with the theme of self-awareness	Co-design Materials for making, telling, and enacting Self-awareness techniques: Guided moment of mindfulness, writing lists of preoccupying thoughts, and visual aids for becoming aware of and scanning one's inner state of being Group reflection	Material co-created by the participants Photos Video recordings Field notes	Thirty stakeholders invited by the entrepreneurs, including customers, seasonal employees, collaborators, and other local entrepreneurs Two design researchers	Rich material for further development and experimentation with a unifying encounter and nature being central themes in all of the concepts Co-creation of ideas in the context of social innovation for which funding was sought on several occasions in 2017* (e.g., a rehabilitation camp for marginalized young people and lonely elderly people, in collaboration with local stakeholders and the municipality) (see Hakio & Mattelmäki, 2019)
Two on-site workshops on the island for co-creating with non-humans and nature Research motivation: Experimenting with the concept of interconnectedness	Co-design Co-sensing exercises: Guided moment of mindfulness, walking meditation, and embodied exploration in free form to let the place talk back Speculative role-taking exercise Group reflection	Material co-created by the participants Photos Audio recordings Field notes	First workshop, with seven random volunteers who were visiting, recruited by the entrepreneurs Second workshop, with sixteen people invited by the entrepreneurs from their social-media networks One design researcher	Workshop 1: Map (sketch) of specific areas and places on the island's nature trail. Participants reflected on their role as humans and what it means to co-create with nature and non-humans. Workshop 2: Participants reflected on the experience of inner movement of taking roles. They explored the becoming from the perspective of otherness. These activities related to sensing from the whole and exploring with the concept of interconnectedness were potentially seen as actions of care (see Hakio and Mattelmäki, 2019).
Two entrepreneur-led workshops for applying the participatory approach in one's own process Rehearsing future services with international customers, Camp school with local primary school students	Observation at the "Rehearsing the Future" workshop Co-designing the camp school experience (secondary source) Interviewing the entrepreneurs afterward on the experience	Audio recordings of the interviews Field notes Photos (secondary source)	Entrepreneur couple, two international friends playing customers, a local municipal official, an apprentice trainee, and a design researcher Sixth-graders at a local primary school and their teachers	The entrepreneur couple applying the participatory method and approach with their potential customers. Experimenting with role-playing and props for future services at the Villa Sofia (the school was under renovation), as well as nature-tourism services for international customers. The findings were utilized in the implementation of the service experiments.
Five entrepreneur-led experiments for prototyping ideas developed in the previous workshops and through the process Camp school (2017) Island wedding concept (2017) Yurt accommodation concept Building a community New recruitment process (2018) (see Hakio & Mattelmäki, 2019)	Observation at camp school, yurt accommodation concept and community-building Island wedding concept, and new recruitment process (secondary sources) Interviewing the entrepreneurs afterward on the experiences	Audio recordings of the interviews Field notes Photos (secondary source)	Sixth-graders at a local primary school and their teachers Customers using the new nature-tourism services Twelve new seasonal employees (new recruitment process) Facebook group for 60 people invited by entrepreneurs from their networks, both like-minded people and local collaborators	Some of the experiments remaining in single-instance form (camp school and wedding concept), while others continue (yurt accommodation and community-building). Via the new recruitment process, group of seven young seasonal employees co-created and implemented a culture and community based on care, solidarity, friendship and self-organization. Without restrictive mental models from previous jobs, they created practices from their own internal vision. The caring atmosphere was transmitted also to customers and spawned positive feedback and praise.
Collecting the local news articles on the place, Facebook posts, and the Elisaari website's updates for following the co-evolution of the place	Desk research	Field notes Archived online material	Indirectly, the entrepreneur couple, customers using the nature-tourism services, and the local community	Research material for the sense-making phases, as well as for overall understanding
Three phone conversations	Reflective dialogue	Field notes	One entrepreneur alongside a design researcher	Research material for the funding applications (2017), as well as for overall understanding
Nine on-site reflective dialogue sessions	Reflective dialogue Presencing exercises	Audio recordings and visualizations of the process Field notes Photos	One or two entrepreneurs and a design researcher	Significant part of the process for jointly making sense of the overall process, bringing to the surface deeper meanings, and discovering central themes Seeds for creating the analytical lenses
Two on-site sense-making sessions	Collaborative sense-making activities Materials for making such as play sand, play-dough, plastic pieces, markers, and paper	Materials co-created in the session Photos Audio recordings Field notes	One entrepreneur with a design researcher	Significant part of the process for jointly making sense of the overall process, bringing to the surface deeper meanings, and discovering central themes
One sense-making session on university premises (2018)	Exploring the collected material together	Video recordings Field notes Photos	Entrepreneur couple and two design researchers	Seeds for creating the analytical lenses

* Separately from research project, the entrepreneurs worked to cooperate with the local municipality in the field of social innovation. They have also applied for funding from various sources to build local collaborations and networks. In 2020, they received funding to build a nature-tourism concept related to the Kalevala (the national epic of Finland) and undertake cooperative endeavors with local entrepreneurs and stakeholders.

Figure 10: Elisaari project data

Book Review

A Learning Journey through a Heart-Centered Book:

A Review of Wilson, P. A. (2019). *The Heart of Community Engagement: Practitioner Stories from across the Globe*. Routledge.

Wendy Allen

University of Colorado Denver
wendy.allen@UCDenver.edu

Lori Ryan

University of Colorado Denver
lori.ryan@ucdenver.edu

Finding the Heart of Community Engagement

In the chapter entitled “Generative Patterns of Practice,” Patricia Wilson reflects back to us what we have also come to deeply appreciate about what it means to become a change agent; speaking to both the synergy and potential energy we discovered this year by engaging with this text:

Becoming a change agent for deep democracy is an ongoing spiral of action and reflection on our own practice that gets deeper - closer to Source, as Scharmer would say - as we tune in to our deepest self and sense fully our co-participation in the living,

evolving social field around us, its emergent possibility, and the purpose that calls us. Therein lies ensemble awareness - the felt sense of interconnectedness and service to the whole. That is the heart of community engagement. (Wilson, 2019, p. 221)

Since 2017 the authors of this book review have co-taught a course on community-based action research with five cohorts of graduate students completing an early childhood leadership certificate. Across these five years, the course focus, texts, and experiences have evolved. Each time we find ourselves more deeply embracing inclusive values and the collective capacity of communities to generate knowledge and prototype actions that will create positive change, especially across the complex systems and spaces where young children grow and learn.

Influenced by our study of *Theory U* (Scharmer, 2018), we have evolved over time to embrace a theory of social change within individuals, groups, and communities that begins with what we call “leading within”. We end each year with what we call a “leading across” capstone project, where graduate students design a process of action learning around a challenge or opportunity to co-create positive change within communities. In more recent years, we have added ways for students to lead inclusive and expansive dialogue with others across perceived boundaries, forms of expression and meaning making, as well as through intersectional identities and lived experiences.

We have come to articulate our pedagogy as grounded in a liberatory stance around the purpose of teaching and learning originally inspired by such voices as Paulo Freire (2015) and author and activist bell hooks (1994). Specifically, when we co-design courses, we bring to life our pedagogy through four leadership learning design principles, namely (1) learners’ *identities and agency* are centered, (2) community and collaboration is at the core of *socially constructed pedagogy*, (3) meaning emerges from *contextually relevant learning experiences*, and (4) an *appreciative stance* illuminates the potential in oneself, and one’s work in community.

This past year, as we began to design the course during the fall of 2020 in the middle of the Covid-19 global pandemic, we evolved the course again. Uncertain how to proceed during a year of profound loss and disruption, we were fortunate to find Patricia Wilson’s 2019 text, where through a series of community engagement stories, she remarkably mirrors pieces of our own journey of what it means to learn with others, while sensing the “invisible web of relationships in which he or she is engaged” (Wilson, 2019, p. 1).

Illuminating Practitioner Identities and Critical Pedagogy

Wilson organizes her text with an introductory chapter sharing her own grounding principles of practice, including her important conception of a community-engaged practitioner. Then through stories, she takes us on a journey organized in three main parts where the inner practice of the change agent

evolves as you go. Each of the seven chapters tell a story of a different place and circumstance, and reflects the growing “inner-awareness” of the community engagement practitioner whose story is being shared.

We found each of these stories to be wonderfully aligned with our own learning design principles. Our students also experienced the synergy of their graduate program through the stories in each chapter.

Key Insights:

- Each story emphasized important aspects of the practitioner's identity and their growing agency as change agents within the broader and often complex change scenarios for deep democracy.
- Each story brought to light how inquiry, dialogue, and reflection among unique groups of people were invited, nurtured and felt.
- The stories drew meaning from the lived experiences unique to each place and context.
- Most importantly, the stories left the reader sensing their own potential to facilitate community-engaged change.

Journeying through the Book's Content

The Heart of Community Engagement is not a methodical text. It does not specifically teach how to identify a research problem or how to write a research question, nor how to design and conduct an action research study from start to finish. Instead, the book journeys the reader through stories where practitioners do the deep inner work, what the author calls “mística” where “facilitators learn the social technologies that can be useful for different purposes.” (Wilson, 2019, p. 218). Instead of methodology, we find the following features of great value as they each inform and inspire the complex processes of community-engaged learning and action.

Stories of Community Change

Wilson includes narratives from seven communities across the globe engaging with a variety of different people and challenging circumstances. These stories of community change are woven together to reveal generative patterns of practice through the lens of the practitioner. Two chapters are drawn from Wilson's own experience and five more from the experiences of other practitioners Wilson has selected. Readers travel the globe, and gain a rich, multicultural perspective on community change.

The Arts

The arts play a role in each chapter of the book “for celebrating the community’s achievements, for connections to sources of inspiration and meaning, for bringing people together, resolving tensions, and creating breakthroughs” (Wilson, 2019, p. 213). For example, in Chapter 5, Building Deep Democracy in South Africa’s Shantytowns, readers follow Joel and Charlotte’s stories, and a series of emerging approaches of self-governance and lessons learned about personal and group processes. Inspired by Charlotte’s model house and the house that was built (see Figure 5.6 in Wilson, 2019, p. 111), our students invited their peers to replicate the experience virtually by creating a space (a 3D model) “where people can learn from each other and make their own changes” (p. 97). Figure 1 offers just one example of the incredibly fertile spaces that were imagined.



Figure 1: 3D model of an imagined space created by reviewers’ student Rosie Evans

Triple-Loop Learning

Readers are invited to engage with the stories intimately in ways that welcome the internal learning processes of change practitioners. This is defined in Chapter 1 as “triple-loop learning,” or as Wilson explains, “the capacity to reflect on one’s own interior state of being...a different kind of learning or knowing that is heartfelt and embodied” (Wilson, 2019, p. 6). Wilson provides thoughtful questions for individual and collective reflection at the end of each chapter. These questions support both self-reflection and the facilitation of small group learning dialogues where readers can grapple with how the stories relate to their own experiences, including the sometimes unspoken aspects of both experiencing and leading change within communities.

Generative Practice Patterns

The final two chapters of the book invite the reader to reflect on 13 generative patterns of practice at play in community engagement. “Often below the surface, these patterns are the most important and influential ones for the practitioner to observe and work with consciously and skillfully” (Wilson, 2019, p. 208). Wilson also offers her own “Personal Credo for Practice” as an “aspirational statement that serves as a guidepost, a set of intentions, a connection to purpose, a reminder of what one stands for” (Wilson, 2019, p. 220). The personal credos written by our group, such as the one below, exemplify the deep learning and self-awareness that can be catalyzed within a community of learners while reading this heart-centered book.

“As a connected human, I believe in the power of love. I choose to love myself so that I can love others. I choose to let love in, so that I can let love out. I believe in staying curious. I choose to always seek to understand and to stay open to the possibilities. I believe in creating spaces where all feel welcome. I choose to be intentional with my actions yet spontaneous, living naturally and with awareness. I believe in a world where every human is inherently enough and every person is valued, belongs and is worthy of being loved. I choose to be mindful of my choices so that they align with giving all people access to the world where they feel and know they are a unique expression of life, worthy and enough just by simply being.” (Graduate student at the University of Colorado, Denver, written reflection, 2021).

It is our wish for all our students of action research and community engagement, that they voice their intentions and purpose with clarity.

Concluding Our First Journey with the Heart Book

We have learned that in our choice of books for this graduate program, we must go beyond simply adopting a text. Instead, we find within us a commitment to embrace each text fully, to live the learning journey along with our students and, if possible, to invite in a conversation with the author. As we approached the conclusion of the course, we shared our experience over the semester with Patricia Wilson, including students’ written reflections in response to the sentence stem, “Something I would like Patricia Wilson to know about our learning community...”. We share one such reflection here:

“... her compilation of stories from around the globe have inspired us to take action in our own local communities, however small they may be. I would like her to know that this work is replicable, relatable, and prevalent in our call to action for a more unified and loving humanity. This text and the concepts presented within, provide an inspiring, confident, and life-giving framework for building a foundation of action research and growth.” (Graduate

student at the University of Colorado, Denver, written reflection, 2021).

We whole-heartedly agree with the back cover description of the text, which states, “this book serves as a much-needed reader of practice stories to help instructors and students find the words, concepts, and examples to talk about their own subjective experience of community engagement practice.” And we would add that it also offers a view into the value of learning from mistakes and the inherent messiness of community engagement that always “remains a work in progress” (Wilson, 2019, p. 3). We are grateful to have made this journey with Patricia Wilson and her community engagement colleagues, where they generously share their own lively curiosity, deep capacities, and moments of opening to an emerging future of social transformation.

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In the Making

System Sensing and Systemic Constellations for Organizational Transformation:

Building Collective Capacity for Navigating Complexity

Luea Ritter

Collective Transitions

luea@collectivetransitions.com

Nancy Zamierowski

Collective Transitions

zam@collectivetransitions.com

Abstract

This paper examines how a systems sensing—or felt-sense—approach and orientation to inquiry and systemic constellation practice might help social change organizations cultivate capacities to better navigate complexity, both in their outer-facing work and internal dynamics as teams and as individuals. We present a pilot study of systemic constellation practice, sharing the experience of participants during and after the practice, as well as our own reflexive process. Currently an undertheorized and underutilized approach within systems thinking work, systems sensing and systemic constellation, can reveal less visible but nevertheless foundational dynamics at play in an organizational body, and can help create more awareness through widening ways of knowing in the

organizational playground. We explore how the facilitated collective sense-making process of systemic constellation engages subtle ways of knowing specifically energetic, relational, and embodied knowing, building on what Heron and Reason (2008) have called an “extended epistemology.” As we suggest, these more subtle ways of knowing warrant further study, particularly as they may contribute to action research methods and foster a more participatory culture of transformation at both an organizational and societal level.

Keywords

systems thinking; systems sensing; systemic constellations; social change; organizational development; complexity

Introduction

As practitioners concerned about making a difference on complex and high-stake societal issues, we are curious how small organizations with ambitious social change agendas can make progress on their immediate problems in ways that strike at the root of large-scale societal issues—while at the same time fostering a more refined, regenerative, and life-affirming organizational culture. We designed our professional practice, Collective Transitions, as a process and innovation catalyst, dedicated to building shared capacity for transformational shifts in organizations, movements, and networks, specifically in the social change sector. Working with a diversity of organizations, we frequently incorporate systems sensing, or an embodied and “felt-sense” approach to engaging with the deeper wisdom of a system that is often hidden from view. In this paper, we detail a pilot study dedicated to the question: “How might systems sensing and systemic constellations enable organizations to widen their collective capacities for navigating complexity?”

Context

Social change organizations, many of them small and untraditional, aim to tackle large-scope missions and complex issues, while navigating organizational complexity, often “in the absence of any blueprint, program or plan” (Stacey & Mowles, 1993, p. 22). There is growing recognition that a sole reliance on linear thought processes, cognitive reasoning, and behavioral protocols is inadequate for addressing the complex, interrelated challenges we face today. We need radically new approaches that are responsive, adaptive, and participatory and that can help us evolve in how we relate to and care for each other, the natural world, and all forms and expressions of life.

We see navigating in complexity as artistry. Complexity is a way to describe that everything is alive and “interacting in multiple ways” (Johnson, 2001, p. 19). It may exceed our ability to process it mentally because, as Cynefin theory suggests, the “causal relationships [of components] are entangled and dynamic and the only way to understand the system is to interact” (Snowden & Zhen,

2021, p. 16). Like wayfinding, the ability to orient or navigate in complexity requires refined ways to understand the current context and artistry in pulling “all the information together to know where you are supposed to be” (Spiller, Barclay-Kerr & Panoho, 2015, p. 33). Bolman and Teal (2017, p. xi) suggest that this type of artistry is not about precision, but about how experience is interpreted and expressed “in forms that can be felt, understood, and appreciated.”

We orient our inquiry within the field of complexity science (Benham-Hutchins & Clancy, 2010; Paley & Gail, 2011), which is concerned with complex systems and with dynamic and unpredictable challenges (Marion, 1999). Within complexity science, the “complex adaptive systems” approach—with its qualities of emergence, adaptation, and self-organization (Holland, 2006)—and “complex responsive systems” with its focus on “the paradox of stability (continuity), and instability (change)” (Stacey, 2012, p. 3) are especially relevant as we strive to better respond to, interact with, and transform the societal challenges we face today.

Thriving in complexity requires shared leadership. Proponents of complexity leadership theory propose that “leadership should be seen not only as position and authority, but also as an emergent, interactive dynamic—a complex interplay ... that produces new patterns of behavior or new modes of operating” (Uhl-Bien, Marion & McKelvey, 2007, pp. 298, 318). Our work is dedicated to exploring how to show up together and relate in ways that produce emergent coherent patterns of interaction toward cultivating a life-affirming culture. This inspires our research on building collective capacities to navigate complexity.

Purpose

What is possible when we foster collective capacities among us? Our interest in exploring the realm of collective capacities is rooted in what we see as the potential to contribute to the conceptualization of complexity leadership theory. It is also rooted in our curiosity about collective processes and practices that:

- experience a specific situation from different perspectives and draw upon wider ways of knowing;
- value the yet unknown, including systemic blind spots, hidden interpersonal and cultural dynamics, and the influence of unacknowledged past events;
- generate collective awareness and the preconditions for relating to the dynamics of systems “in artful ways,” and
- develop practical tools for application and learning for social change work.

The purpose of this paper is to introduce and reflect on the use of systemic constellations and systems sensing as a participatory and inquiry-based action research approach to building collective capacity, including accessing a wider

range of ways of knowing (Heron & Reason, 2008), and acknowledging that there are diverse ways to relate with life beyond our mental capabilities. When leaning into the unknown and meeting complexity, we see value from drawing upon a diverse range of information and experiences to cross-reference, gain clarity, and make meaning of a given situation together.

To address the question: “How might systems sensing and systemic constellations enable organizations to widen their collective capacities for navigating complexity?”, we brought together nine co-researchers¹ from four organizations to participate in a pilot study of the systemic constellations practice. Each of the participating organizations works to bring about meaningful systemic change within complex and challenging contexts, through a focus on building a regenerative culture and social innovation across multiple sectors within translocal or global communities. Organizations A and B work with global farmers and local leaders, Organization C focuses on research and applied tools that support caregivers, and Organization D is developing a platform for civil society to create a transboundary “community of communities” across a watershed.

In what follows, we report on a three-phase pilot study including a systemic constellation and group reflection process involving participation from all four organizations. After introducing key concepts, we provide a description of our methodology and then detail a systemic constellation practice focusing on a case example from one organization. Through a collective practice and reflection process, we aimed to make subjective experiences both visible and observable, and then generalized these experiences into patterns and dynamics—or what a system is “making together.” We reflect further on learnings in the study and conclude by highlighting three areas of value.

Key Concepts

Key concepts used in this paper include: 1) capacities, 2) systems sensing and system thinking, and 3) systemic constellations.

Capacities

A capacity speaks to the ability to perceive, feel, and receive, and from there enter into a relationship with the world, including both tangible and subtle aspects. Capacity can be described as an interface that can take many shapes, forms, and expressions. Capacities are built and evolve over time and through experiences in individuals and collectives, in order to relate and respond to given situations.

¹ To protect the confidentiality of our co-researchers, we refer to the four organizations as A, B, C, and D.

Like a learning organism, collective capacities function as an interconnected ecosystem of capacities, each having the ability to adapt, build upon, and reinforce one another and to evolve together based on shared experiences. In the context of complexity, collective capacities such as the capacity to be with what is, work through tension consciously, and welcome emergence can be seen as the preconditions necessary for building a shared leadership culture—a way of being in relationship with each other, the greater context, and the task at hand.

Systems Sensing and Systems Thinking

Systems sensing is informed by the interdisciplinary field of systems thinking (Meadows, 2008; Senge et al., 2004), which involves mapping how a system's parts interrelate and how a system functions over time and within the context of larger systems. Meadows (2008, pp. 178, 181) provides hints that there might be more to systems than we can see, highlighting the value of “listening to the wisdom of the system” as well as “celebrating complexity.” Systems thinking, and its application in organizational and leadership development (Senge et al., 2004; Wheatley, 2006; Zohar, 2016), have been sources for our conceptualization of a systems sensing approach. Meadows' (2008) emphasis on leverage points inspires our exploration of ways to shift preconceived assumptions, mindsets, and ingrained patterns.

Systems sensing adds a dimensionality of the felt senses to a visual map of diverse elements and interactive relationships. If we compare systems thinking and systems sensing using the body as a metaphor, systems thinking might be understood as the connective tissues that define space and give structure to the system and how it moves overall. Systems sensing might be understood as the quality and resonance of the connective tissue, inclusive of the spaces between the structural elements, which inform and galvanize the body.

Systems sensing can be understood as a visceral aptitude that draws on innate human capacities for being in relation with, listening deeply to, and momentarily embodying the elements of a system. In other words, it is an “embodied dialogue” with the social field or “the entirety of the social system with an emphasis on the source conditions” (Scharmer et al., 2021, p. 5). We also take a cue from Scharmer's (2016, p. 142) articulation of “sensing” as “thinking and feeling together”, and Heron's (1992) conceptualization that experiential learning, including feelings, emotion, intuition, and imagery, forms the basis of other ways of knowing (Kasl & Yorks, 2002, p. 183).

Systemic Constellations

Systemic constellations is a collective practice of creating a dynamic model of a particular system using individuals who represent and embody different elements of the system in order to reveal and transform its hidden patterns and underlying dynamics. Systemic constellations work is inspired by the therapeutic approach known as family constellations (Hellinger et al., 1998), which includes

trans-generational and phenomenological aspects with connection to family systems therapy; it is also inspired by the ancestor reverence of South Africa's Zulu people (Cohen, 2006). Many practitioners and researchers have contributed to this developmental practice and literature, and systemic constellations has further evolved from family constellations, organizational constellations (Weber, 2000), and structural constellations (Sparrer & Varga von Kibéd, 2000). Our work is situated in a niche oriented toward societal transformation contexts, multi-stakeholder issues, and the discovery of interrelated patterns across organizations.

Systemic constellations uses a systems sensing or felt-sense approach to inquiry to explore relational patterns. During a constellation session, participants are invited to represent different “elements” of the challenge being tackled by the group; these may include people, places, emotions, qualities, or essential details of a system. As representative elements, participants respond somatically and spontaneously to each other through a facilitated process, making each felt experience visible. Through this process, a systemic constellation can help identify and release embedded (including trauma-informed) patterns and reveal new ways of connecting with a certain situation or context (Cohen, 2006). Such transformation can bring about “positive” as well as “negative” outcomes.

The systemic constellations process typically includes the following five steps:

1. Co-design a guiding inquiry or “calling question” which aims to focus attention and intention on a particular challenge during the systemic constellation. The question should be powerful, generative, and life-affirming, and its scope and aim must be reasonable and realistic.
2. Decide on the essential “elements” to be included that are relevant to the “calling question.”
3. Invite each participant to represent or embody an element to which they feel drawn. Participants then sense into the qualities of the element and embody it, not as a form of role play but rather to become present and available to any somatic sensations, images, or thoughts of that element.
4. To begin, representatives take time to find their position in a given space in relation to the other elements, forming an “interactive constellation.”
5. The facilitator then invites each participant in turn to speak from his or her position, inquiring deeper into the current felt-sense experience, the perceived relation to other elements, and any desire to shift position. The process unfolds slowly so any subtle shifts can be better perceived and incorporated by everyone present.

Methodology

To explore how systems sensing and, in particular, systemic constellations can contribute to complexity leadership, we initiated a pilot study dedicated to exploring how the approach can expand one's perspective and cultivate collective capacities for navigating complexity. As the convening organization, and in line with our dedication to co-creating and refining shared knowledge and practice, we adapted a cooperative inquiry method (Heron & Reason, 2001, 2008). Our iteration of the method, which involves systemic constellations practice, aligns with Lessem & Schieffer's (2010) conceptualization of cooperative inquiry as "feeling the Presence of some Energy, Person, or Place, [wherein] you intuitively grasp Patterns" (p. 231). We combined the four-stage process of cooperative inquiry with a focus group format, designing a small pilot study consisting of three group sessions over 90 days. We adapted the flow of cooperative inquiry to meet the circumstances of our group: each call (held virtually using Zoom and Google Slides) was two hours long and required minimal pre-work from the co-researchers in their communities.

Phase 1 was a preparation phase dedicated to understanding the current challenges of the organizations and their perceptions of complexity. Phase 2 was the constellation exercise, an opportunity to practice together, testing systemic constellations as an embodied approach to building capacities for navigating complexity (using Organization A as the case study). Phase 3 offered a space for reflection and learning, including a large-group discussion on the systemic constellation experience as a whole and an open-ended journaling reflection. We solicited further feedback from the participants on the usefulness of the practice shortly after Phase 3 and again six months later to glean longer-term insights.

Systems Sensing Pilot Study

Phase One: Preparing the Ground

Phase 1 provided a space for the co-researchers to get to know each other and for us to set the stage for the research process. The co-researchers engaged in a mapping exercise to understand how each person viewed complexity, and then shared how they navigated a challenge in the context of their work. We then provided background on systemic constellations and invited participants to offer a *case*—that is, a topic or issue relevant to the organization that could serve as the focus for the systemic constellation.

After this group call, we invited the founder of Organization A and his consultant (a fellow co-researcher) to serve as *case givers* for the systemic constellation that we would conduct in Phase 2 with all co-researchers present. To prepare for Phase 2, we had a preparatory call with Organization A to co-design a *calling question* and the *elements* for the upcoming group practice.

During this preparatory call, we learned about the desire of Organization A's founder to make the organization more decentralized and resilient through shared ownership and shared power, and by calling on diverse skill sets. Organization A was at a growth threshold, expanding in capabilities, audience, and brand recognition, yet it lacked the resources (i.e., funding and team support) to fully implement the work. The founder shared his mounting anxiety about how to navigate sensitive topics with a range of stakeholders, including funders: "More and more, I find myself in situations where anxiety prevents me from speaking up." During this facilitated call, we asked him if these dynamics are somehow familiar or remind him of previous experiences either in his personal or professional life. After some reflection, he revealed a story from his childhood: "My biggest trauma is not the times I've almost died, but being attacked and feeling voiceless at the dinner table, jumped on by my siblings. The inability to communicate still haunts me." He described his own journey to regain power and a command of language through his organization, which gives voice to farmers who are often marginalized, disempowered, and voiceless: "Every day I fight for people that were not invited to sit at a table with those with resources and power."

As this founder's organization grew, like many social change organizations it faced a tension between capacity and resources, with a small team tackling a large-scope mission and complex issues. This disparity led to inquiry around what capacities the organization might cultivate to shift toward a more thriving, decentralized structure and further its mission.

We reflected with the case giver on how his inner (personal) struggles could translate to the capacity of the organization more broadly, specifically its ability to attract and secure the resources it needed to grow. From that insight, we landed on the calling question for Phase 2: "What is Organization A invited to cultivate as capacities for shifting toward a more thriving, decentralized organization?"

Based on the themes that arose in the reflection and in relationship with the calling question, we then selected the specific "elements" that were part of the playground and relational map of this inquiry: Organization A, Founder, Team, Three Sisters², Capacities, and Resources that a system can acknowledge and start to access for supportive qualities.

² Three Sisters—referring to the beans, squash, and maize of Native American polyculture farming—is used by the organization to conceptualize how its programs work as "a dynamic and cyclic living system."

Phase Two: Systemic Constellation Experience

In Phase 2, we introduced our systemic constellations method, with the goal of surfacing implicit relational dynamics and patterns. We gave co-researchers a brief training in the practice, introducing the case, the calling question, and the elements that we had co-designed with the case giver (Organization A).

Typically, a systemic constellation is done in-person, using the body to sense in relationship to others. Adapting for our COVID-19 era, we used Google Slides to display a visual map of colored icons, serving as elements (figure 1). One of the co-authors, Luea, served as the facilitator for the systemic constellation. Co-researchers could enroll in the following roles: case giver, representative for an element, or witness—an active observer of the systemic constellation who contributes by holding space (Plett, 2020).

Co-researchers enrolled as representatives for elements in the constellation (as they felt called to do so), and began positioning that element's icon on the screen in relation to the others. Once representing an element, co-researchers were to “sense into” that element, using their physical body and felt senses. The facilitator guided co-researchers to: “Allow your body to become an instrument and pick up the energetic patterns, resonance, how the element feels or how it moves. You might feel: tiredness, a lot of energy, heat, cold, leaning to one side, or get an image. All of this is information.” The co-researchers were then invited to use the sensed information to reorient their element (icon) on the screen in relation to the others.

Four of the elements (Organization A, the Founder, Three Sisters, and Capacities) received representation immediately, while the remaining two (Team and Resources) did not. The facilitator began the constellation with the four represented elements. When the representative for the Founder was asked how she was doing with her positioning, she said, “I struggle with where to look: forward, or toward the organization.” She noted a desire to shift her icon's point or nose “forward,” facing upward on the screen, but sensed a reliance on the Organization, as well as Resources, which was not yet present. When asked if she needed anything to help shift her position, the Founder indicated “the team,” and a co-researcher enrolled to represent Team.

The facilitator checked in with the rest of the elements in turn, asking how they felt and how they wanted to shift their positions on the screen. The representative for Capacities explained that he was “waiting to be discovered and activated,” since “capacities are conceptual—one has no proof that capacities are real.” Meanwhile, the representative for Team reported a sense of waiting for something, and that it could not yet fully take action: “I'm observing and curious. I like being here.”

The facilitator asked whether this resonated with the two case givers, whose role in the exercise was to observe, inviting their feedback during the process. One member of Organization A replied, “A few of you have said that you don't know why you're saying [these sentences], but what you're saying and even the expression of how things have been said have resonated so much.”

The facilitator asked if anyone felt called to represent Resources. A co-researcher volunteered, taking a position beneath and to the left of Capacities. When the Founder³ moved forward, Resources expressed a desire to follow the Founder, yet admitted he felt too dependent on Capacities, so did not move. As the systemic constellation unfolded, there seemed to be an ongoing tension between Capacities and Resources. Co-researchers began to interpret these tensions symbolically as representations of dynamics within the organization. At one point, Capacities stated, “I think resources are capacities made manifest.”

The facilitator invited each representative to share his or her current experience and to shift positions if they felt called to do so. As each of the elements took new positions in relation to each other, they shared insights and reported how they felt (see the evolution of movements in Figure 1). For instance, the representative for Organization A remarked to Capacities: “It’s your time to show up and shine. Take some space.” After other elements made their final moves, Organization A took what she called a “leap of faith” and moved behind the Team and Founder. She said: “As the Organization, I feel I can be very clear and powerful, yet also caring and humble about things.”

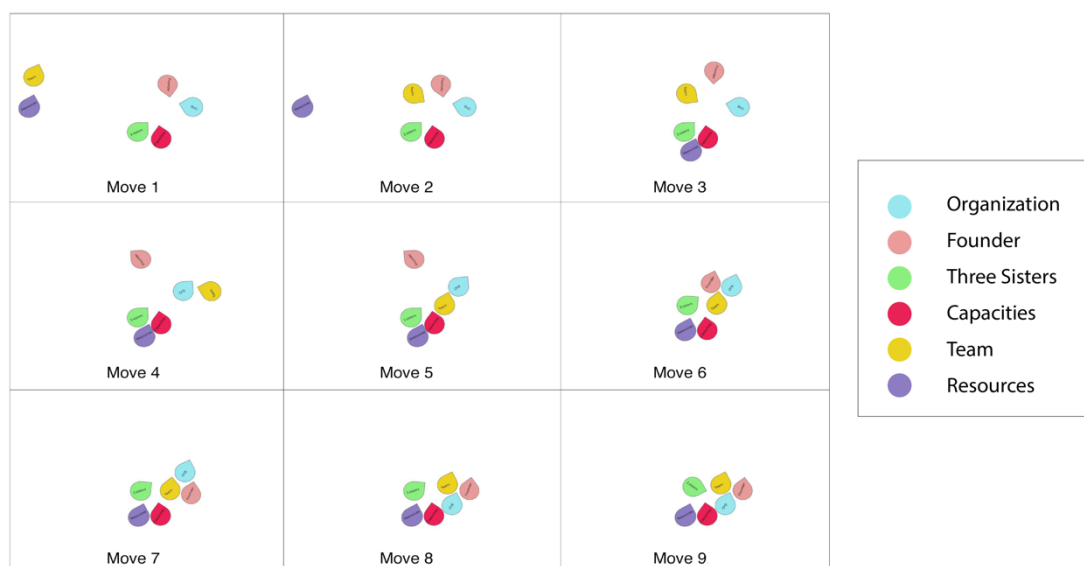


Figure 1: Systemic Constellation Map and Movements, highlighting 9 major moves of elements that were made during the systemic constellation. These screens were created and displayed via Google Slides online. Each icon of an element was represented by a co-researcher and the point indicates “a nose” and where the element is facing.

The constellation then concluded and the group took a moment to debrief and address lingering questions. Debriefing helps transform an experiential learning activity into knowledge (Kolb, 2014). The facilitator asked the case

³ “Founder” refers to the person embodying the founder role during the systemic constellation.

givers: “How is it now for you? Is there anything that feels unresolved?” A case giver reflected on the patterns that emerged over the course of the systemic constellation: “It was interesting to see the struggle between Capacities and Resources play out.... I like where all the elements landed.... it felt unified and together and felt really powerful to me.” A witness reflected on the mental and physical responses she observed during the exercise: “I was moved by [Organization A’s] discomfort in certain moments.... the leap of faith at the end...felt like the right thing to do.” Another co-researcher noted in response to the dynamic positioning of the elements on the screen: “Organization A adopting and modeling a different way of leading and being in community...is part of our collective responsibility.... I found it very humbling to see Organization A moving behind the Team and the Founder, and the Three Sisters arm in arm, almost like the container to shepherd them.”

Phase Three: Reflection and Learning

The following week, we began Phase 3 with a large-group discussion on the systemic constellation experience, and asked the witnesses and case-givers to share what stood out or resonated with them. By reflecting on systemic constellations as a collective practice and what was “being made” from the individual responses over time, we aimed to provide an opportunity to reveal ingrained patterns and dynamics and any noticeable shifts in capacity to navigate new or unknown situations.

Overall, the group expressed genuine curiosity and was intrigued by the systemic constellation experience. The representative for Organization A shared that what she “found fascinating in this practice was that we were all able to step into the different elements and embody things that seemed to be specific to the organization’s actual experience, even though we didn’t know much about it or its context.” She added: “The qualities I felt were quite specific and are not things I usually feel present in me. I was intrigued that I could discern... feelings, intuitions, ways of dealing with things that are not in line with what I would probably do in a similar situation.” A case giver noted, “I was surprised by how the comments made by representatives were congruent to my personal feelings about the element represented.”

During the preparatory call prior to the group systemic constellation, the case giver had shared his desire to cultivate a team and to design an organizational growth model to attract funders. The systemic constellation allowed him to witness this possibility and transition: “What felt really good in this experience was an understanding that I had a Team and could see the journey of all the elements and that struggle of Capacities and Resources, because...we are under-resourced. It was important for me to see Capacities and Resources as separate elements and the fuller expression of how they were represented. My limited mind would never have seen that. It was beautiful to see those boundaries broken and pushed.”

The tension and confusion between Capacities and Resources was a prominent pattern in the systemic constellation and noted in several reflections. The Founder representative observed that “the back and forth between Capacities and Resources was interesting.... Do you go after resources in order to expand capacity? I also felt like you needed capacity to be able to go after those resources.” Metaphorizing capacity and resources in the constellation helped differentiate them and illuminate the patterns that were playing out internally. We asked the founder how he made sense of the delayed entry of Resources in the systemic constellation. He reported the organization’s perseverance despite a dearth of resources:

Last month [after Phase 2], we did a huge event in less than two weeks.... over 30,000 people from around the world for food justice talks. We did this with no funding and no grant. I think the reason we accomplished this was because of that collective team and our capacity. It was not driven by resources, but too often we are thinking in that framework.... Witnessing the constellation mapping, it was nice to see that transition...looking away and forward, versus on Resources. I believe that movement between Capacities and Resources was what helped cultivate capacities and the team, and that is leading to funding coming into the organization. This is the shift.

When asked if anything had shifted in the moment when Organization A said to Capacities, “It’s your time to show up and to shine. Take some space,” the case giver noted the inner shift that had occurred since Phase 1: “Trust. I’ve started to trust myself more.” He also reflected that the sudden interruption caused by the COVID-19 crisis became an opportunity to “flourish and shine”: “We knew how to navigate in a world of uncertainty and scarcity. I made a commitment to myself to not wake up every day and think about chasing funders. Instead, we did what we needed to do, centered on that integrity.” From this point, “resources...started to flow” as the organization began to secure needed funding.

Further Reflections after the Pilot Study

Shortly after the final gathering, to understand whether systems sensing and systemic constellations had any influence on the organization’s capacity to navigate complexity, we asked the founder of Organization A—the case giver—if the experience gave him insight into the calling question (“What is Organization A invited to cultivate as capacities for shifting toward a more thriving, decentralized organization?”). He shared what he felt was the greatest direct value created through the experience: “The process helped me to become a better leader, namely it helped me understand my own vulnerability.... within the organization, within my own placement within the organization, and how to exist in that context in the world at large.” We wondered whether this inner shift also led to outer manifestations.

Six months later, the founder noted several changes in the organization. First, the organization grew in capacity and resources while building toward decentralization, as the founder expanded from a team of contractors to six full-time staff to support communications, systems management, program direction, and design. Secondly, as the founder explained, the organization clarified its messaging and voice: “Food sovereignty is the language we use because the communities that grow our food are the ones that have been oppressed and objectified.” At the end of the conversation, he suggested doing a systemic constellation with his new team, which signaled to us that he found merit in the approach.

Discussion and Conclusion

So what does this pilot study tell us about the value of systems sensing and the systemic constellations approach to enable organizations to widen their collective capacities for navigating complexity?

Systems sensing practices can stimulate another way of being with and relating to each other in order to share responsibility, explore possibilities, and relate to unknown and unnamed factors. By exploring the case from different angles and perspectives, the co-researchers gained new ways of looking at an issue and supported an internal shift for the founder while disrupting current assumptions and cognitive storylines. The experience highlighted how events in the past, including personal ones, may be influencing the current situation.

Based on the findings of this study, we propose that systems sensing and systemic constellations can contribute to organizational change practice and complexity leadership theory in three key areas:

- the important role of expanding one’s perspective by calling upon and engaging with wider ways of knowing, including sharing vulnerable aspects, systemic blind spots, and personal dynamics that might influence and be mirrored in the “outer” organizational work;
- the significance of building and cultivating collective capacity—such as being with what is, listening through engaging with wider ways of knowing, and daring to not know—in order to be able to enter into dialogue with the more hidden, subtle, and implicit dynamics as a group; and
- the relevance of cross-organizational spaces for practice and engaging with collective awareness and their ability to strengthen the artistry for navigating complexity.

The practice of systemic constellation enlivens the artistry of navigating complex terrains collectively. Systems sensing and systemic constellations are processes that can help practitioners slow down to tune into signals from the felt senses and wider ways of knowing more explicitly as individuals and collectives.

This enables them to somatically experience a specific issue or challenge from different angles and make sense of these signals together as the practice unfolds. These processes can cultivate shared awareness and capacities for relating to and understanding the interrelated dynamics of systems, including subtle interpersonal and collective dynamics informed by past events that may be unacknowledged or unresolved. This can inform the way individuals and teams relate and interact with one another or influence how issues are addressed. In summary, the practice of systemic constellations contributes to the concept of shared leadership, as described by Uhl-Bien, Mario & McKelvey (2007), by illuminating unnamed, unconscious, or unknown dynamics and patterns operating in complex adaptive systems, including relationality and interdependence across topic, place, scale, and time.

This research brings up vital questions for future action-oriented research: for instance, what is informing how we perceive, and how is that informing how we make meaning of situations and contexts, and the unfolding of our behaviors and actions?

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Discussant Commentary

Realizing Collective Capacities to Navigate Complexity:

Topological Sensing Works, but We Know Not How and Why

Raghav Rajagopalan
Anusandhan Trust
raghav.rajagopalan@gmail.com

Action Research Holds a Unique Promise for Today's Crises

The myth of modernity is powerfully underscored by the singular theology of rationality—feeling (emotions) and sensing (sensations, intuitions) are regarded as suspect and banished from social discourse and knowledge: solely valid are logical reasoning and linear connection. The display of emotions is highly regimented: many emotions are permitted expression only in specific private spaces and must be managed privately by the individual to meet this boundary objective. Emotions may otherwise find passive or channelized expression in the Arts. Classical, first-order Science posits an objective reality and assigns the agency, ingenuity and technological skills of the scientist to the decoding of reality (Latour, 1993; Müller, 2016; Rajagopalan, 2020).

If we are living in a post-positivist era, why am I referring to the traditional positivist construct? It is because this remains the dominant force in all the key

fields of human endeavor: politics, economics, technology, and management; it remains the dominant paradigm in science too. For example, there is a disproportionate and unwarranted enthusiasm about systems thinking (or systems science) as *the* framework to solve all our current problems of complexity, such as healthcare in the pandemic season or the climate issue. Notwithstanding that ambition, the sobering fact is that all extant methods and practices in systems thinking are very much embedded in a rationalistic frame (Rajagopalan, 2020); although newly emerging and as yet, marginal systems literature is enlarging this canvas (e.g., Bateson 2016a; 2016b). Also, sophisticated theories, methods and practices looking at systems in specialized areas of application—for example, psychotherapy (e.g., Grof, 1988) or action research (e.g., Heron, 1996)—are not adequately assimilated into the mainstream of this fledgling discipline; while newer findings from the sciences, e.g., the neurosciences or cognitive studies (e.g., Seth, 2018), have also not percolated in.

In this scenario, words like sensing and sensemaking are typically consigned to artistic preoccupations like fine art or film-making. They are not yet seen as valid or valuable in the fields like science, technology, management, economics etc., where the new mantra everywhere is “evidence-based” (MacKewn, 2008).

I make this detour to situate action research as an extremely important and valuable discipline. In the modern context, I believe there are only *three* extant approaches to inquiry or knowledge that acknowledge sensing as a useful tool. These are (i) action research (e.g., Heron, 1996); (ii) healing methods including psychotherapeutic and group therapy approaches (amongst which I draw in particular on a tradition recently developed in India called human process inquiry, (Sumedhas, 2012); and (iii) Indigenous inquiry traditions which survive (e.g., Somé, 1993). Amongst these three, the highest possibility for finding universal acceptance seems to reside in Action Research, which can develop the theoretical wherewithal soon. Alternative healing methods cannot easily justify their potential when subject to research within the allopathic model of disease, health and treatment protocols. It should be possible to develop research protocols that show their efficacy when studied within their own paradigms and diagnostic and treatment protocols, but such research has not been attempted. There is interest in Indigenous inquiry traditions in some parts of the world, but whether the attempt is to mainstream and integrate their wisdom or whether the Indigenous people are permitted to exercise power and agency over certain domains is a moot question.

The challenge action research faces, is to bridge the gap to what is considered as “Science”, as “rational” and therefore of universal acceptability. Fortunately, the impregnability of these defenses of the modernity project about what is acceptable is crumbling quite rapidly, with two-fold developments: i) advancements in science in fields like neurosciences and cognitive studies (Seth, 2018); animal behavior; and theories of science in terms of second-order science and third-order cybernetics (Mueller, 2016); ii) the failure of the modernity

project along key vaunted dimensions such as the idea of nation-states and electoral democracies; capitalism; food security and healthcare systems, etc.

The recognition that a paradigm shift in thinking is required, the key to which is an epistemic shift (represented by extended ways of knowing harnessed by the three approaches mentioned earlier), is acquiring dim recognition (Rajagopalan & Midgley, 2015; Rajagopalan, 2022). Such an epistemic shift must correspond to an ontological shift, which sees the human mind and its processes as embedded in nature and a larger intelligence, not standing apart from and looking at nature from the outside. Modernity arrogates complete agency to the individual; the alternate onto-epistemologies accept a co-evolving, co-emergent nature of reality. This corresponds to the new understanding of the nature of mind and consciousness emerging in all the new developments in science mentioned in the last paragraph.

I can relate powerfully to the methods and examples/case studies of action research, although I have not practiced it in terms of any specific or recognized approaches, because they mirror my experience in adapting human process inquiry (Sumedhas, 2012) mixed with other tools to organizational development (Rajagopalan, 2022). One other tool I have used often is a topological approach. Herein, we map opposing perceptions/positions in an organizational context on the floor of the room. We then invite members to explore the space by relating to this map and taking up positions on it (Rajagopalan, 2022). So, my commentary that follows relies heavily on my personal experience with these modalities; and I am less acquainted with the range of theory corresponding to these aspects of action research.

Touching and Seeing System Configurations

The article from *Collective Transitions* describes a pilot study that explored how systems sensing and systemic constellations can contribute to complexity leadership. “Systemic constellations” refers to a specific methodology which is a practice of collectively creating a dynamic model of a particular system—identifying elements of a system and sensing into the relational and dynamic aspects that constellate them into typical behavioral patterns. The study was divided into 3 phases—Phase 1 prepared the ground by identifying the “elements” and fashioning/articulating a “calling question” that would focus the actual inquiry in the second phase. This was related to the challenge faced by a specific social organization (case givers) in its ambition to grow. In phase 2, the actual systemic constellation practice activity used the inputs about the organization under study for co-researchers from three other organizations of a similar nature to sense into the dynamic patterns of the relations between these elements and the tensions/potentials inhering in them (some co-researchers assumed the roles of the elements from Phase 1 while others acted as witnesses). In Phase 3, the experience of the activity and practice of Phase 2 and the emergent voices and movements it entailed, was reflected to the case givers and

witnesses, adding to the insights and aiding assimilation and closure of the experiential inquiry.

I consider the article's primary contribution to the literature on awareness of systems as offering testimony about collective sensing. There is a ring of truth about the narrative and the testimony in the form of actual quotes of statements shared by the researchers at various stages.

This case study indicates a successful intervention for the transformation of an organization using the systemic constellation technique. It identifies three key areas in complexity leadership theory and organizational change practice that the method can impact: expanding members' perspectives using extended epistemologies; developing this into a collective sensing capability; and the value of cross-organizational spaces to engage with such collective sensing applied to navigating complexity.

I love the way co-operative inquiry has been extended and adapted in this pilot study, and how a technique of sensing has been adapted to the virtual reality of a Zoom meeting. There are clear research goals, and the reporting is focused.

Certain emergent responses and developments in the narrative seem to have been pivotal in the stages of sensing and sensemaking leading to a transformation towards successful navigation of the growth challenges by the case giver organization over a period. The brief reporting and allusion to these key shift points are tantalizing and beg key questions in my mind, chiefly:

The choice of elements is curious—they do not form a logical set of items at the same level or category of analysis, and this might seem capricious. Since this is a key part of the method, further detailed explanation of the way these were arrived at, and the logic for elements at disparate levels of aggregation forming this shortlist, would have helped.

The most powerful aspect of the narration of the systemic constellation technique is from one of the co-researchers who felt drawn to enact the role in phase 2, who says that despite a very limited brief and no contextual information about the case giver organization, she found the practice fascinating, as she could sense into the element and voice statements about “qualities I felt were quite specific and are not things I usually feel present in me”. All the co-researchers in phase 2 were able to step into the different elements and embody things that seemed to belong to the case giver organization. Case givers were often struck by the deep resonance of the words and statements from role takers in the constellating activity with their sense and feelings associated with their organization.

My description of the systemic constellation practice is an imaginative extrapolation from the study report which does not elaborate on this activity. It may sound theatrical because that resonance sits deeply with me—I frequently use forms of theatre exercises in my organizational change practice. Just as an

actor feels into her character in theatre, the role takers in phase 2 assumed the character of the elements they were given. Exactly as an actor can summon a flowing, dynamic knowing about that character's weave through the drama, in a similar vein, feelings, sensations and words were evoked in the role-holders that were not part of their intrinsic personality. A lay perspective on such altered sensing and knowing might hold it as a mere affectation—indeed, a fair deal of commercial acting in cinema and theatre might be just that.

On the other hand, there are plenty of testimonials that such sensing and knowing discern real patterns of relatedness and “constellation”—which I interpret as the degree and nature of entanglement between any two elements. I have encountered this routinely, and found testimonials to its working in several human activities. A powerful example of its presence in theatre is found in Seeley & Reason (2008). This example underscores what many users of applied theatre frequently encounter: that role holders enacting real-life situations/events from another protagonist's life stumble upon information that was not previously shared with them. I have included several examples from my use of theatre (Rajagopalan, 2020). Precisely the same phenomenon operates in various forms of alternative healing that uses sensing methods. I know this from my practice of Pranic Healing (akin to Reiki, which is better known in the West). I also know from the experience of several colleagues who are yoga adepts that they can routinely and confidently “suss out” the states of mind and the topics of worry of people near them, through bodily sensations that the other person transmits to them. While I have no first-hand experience, again it seems that this is also the case with several Indigenous forms of inquiry into aspects other than health, such as ecological or climate questions, or the search for food while hunting (Brody, 1981), etc. Frequently, the transmission of such knowing is apprehended or described as having to do with energy. This has also become the language with which Action Research seeks to theorize such experience.

Such sensing by individuals can be treated as a mystical experience, which cannot be confirmed or validated, and is thus mumbo-jumbo or voodoo to rationalists. However, many such practices are frequently collective—where the sensing by one member is confirmed by the others. This is generally true for the healing cluster of practices as well as the Indigenous inquiry cluster. I have personally experienced this concordance in Pranic Healing, witnessed it among yoga adepts and ayurvedic doctors, and the palpable sense of “clear as daylight” concordance is frequent in theatre and in group process work from the human process inquiry tradition of the Sumedhas academy in India which I am a part of. The article under discussion describes the development and use of a tool to confirm its validity in collective inquiry within action research traditions.

Topology and Sensing

What remains a mystery in a most fundamental sense is how this sensing is topologically adapted. In practicing Pranic Healing from a distance, where the person being healed may be anywhere else on the planet; the technique involves

imagining/conjuring a small image of the person like a doll in front of one's eyes and sensing the aura or energies across the regions of the body. In my organization development practice, an imaginary map of perspectival positions is superimposed on the floor of the room, and participants sense energies and tensions as they walk through this space. In Ayurveda, there is a technique that can be translated as a three-pulse technique, where the pulse at the wrist is sensed using three fingers corresponding to three key qualities that determine health: this maps on to an accurate diagnosis of the precise organ which may be malfunctioning. In all indigenous traditions, places on the earth carry significant energies which communicate to their peoples.

Such sensing is *not idiosyncratic or mere fantasy or imagination*; because practitioners often find *strong concord/congruence/concurrence* in their sensing when comparing notes after independently performing the sensing.

Ghosh (2021) has provided several instances to buttress the fact that “[a] landscape was [is] capable of making its own meanings, and of narrating its own stories. This is completely different from a situation in which humans create a cultural construction of a place, investing it with myths and meanings of their own invention” (Ghosh, 2021, p. 220). He researches the Banda, an Indonesian island where the entire original population was exterminated during colonization by the Dutch and several mixed populations brought in to repopulate the land. Current inhabitants identify themselves with common myths about sacred places and spirits on the island, even as they aver and acknowledge that they are not indigenous to the place, but have mixed origins from several other lands. The vitality of a landscape, or a space, he says, can create bonds of connection to itself and between people who come to dwell there (Ghosh, 2021, p. 221). So, there is much to be said about the mysterious vitality and energy that inheres in places and things, and about sensing as a way of knowing about these.

From my own experience, there is no dilution of the sensing capacity with distance, or representation, as when a doll-sized imaginary stands in for the person to be healed; or a floor map, or a diagram, is substituted for the actual object of concern.

Deeply Precious Valuable Knowing

This brings us to the basic questions of validity and reliability—the totem poles of Science that distinguish modernity from past cultures. There is no space to go into these questions in detail, which has been done in detail and severally elsewhere (for one example, see Rajagopalan, 2020). When multiple persons can “sense” the same/identical aspect, then it becomes verifiable, even if it is not measurable by a scientific instrument. Again, if these “sensing’s” routinely bring succor—whether in healing, organizational change, or ecology/other fundamental aspects of indigenous inquiry, then that demonstrates reliability. A lot of these alternate forms of inquiry have failed to repudiate themselves because we have frequently not undertaken the effort to precisely measure and record the numbers and degree (percentages) of accuracy in cross-validation by multiple

researchers taking “readings” of the same “samples” or recording the numbers and percentages of cases with “successful outcomes” from the application of the same technique. One might contrast this with pharmacology where drugs are approved when success in achieving 50% of remission in a symptom is observed in merely 30% of the tested population, where the mechanism of action may have been hypothesized, or it may be completely unknown. Again, when the recent explosion of interest in psychedelic drugs like psilocybin is driven by the statement that users experience an alternate reality—one where their sense of separation of individual self from the rest of the world is dissolved—science has no method of validating such an observation. But it has found acceptance. This strikes at the very foundational roots of the onto-epistemology of the modernity project.

We need more studies like this one, building an adequate critical mass of “evidence” to fuel the needed shift in ways of knowing and doing, which action research splendidly pioneers.

Surrendering, Connecting, Unlocking Transformation and Growth

What the psilocybin story tells us is this: The fundamental distinction between the modernity project and other cultures and epistemologies is the fragmentations of reality involved in the former. The subject-object divide is unassailable: the mind of the agent Self (subject) is contemplating the inert reality of the Other: it is an instrumental approach, frequently themed as war and conquest. In all the other approaches which involve sensing, the mind of the Self has to be emptied to receive the “sense” of the mind of the Other (person, place or thing); it is a generative, receptive, creative meeting—a trusting surrender, not a war!

A frequent refrain across all the various domains that utilize sensing to connect with reality is that if the mind is completely emptied to receive the “sensing” with fidelity, then whatever needs to be healed, corrected or aligned immediately begins to auto-correct (once such a sensing connect is made and the disjunct aspect imaged with fidelity in the sensing). No other further corrective action is required from the human agent, and the correction will emerge and flow of its own accord (if it is not trammelled again by egoistic intervention).

What might this imply for our current crises and the “battle” to save the planet—are we COPping out, just COPing, or being sensible at all?

Raghav Rajagopalan is the author of *Immersive Systemic Knowing: Advancing Systems Thinking Beyond Rational Analysis* (Springer, October 2020). He has also contributed chapters to the first editions of the *Handbook of Systems Sciences* (Springer Live Reference) and the *Handbook of Systems Thinking* (Routledge - forthcoming). He is on the editorial panel for the *Journal of Systems Thinking*. He is a Fellow of Sumedhas, also at the European School of Governance, and a Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Systems Studies at Hull University. He is a member of the International Society for Systems Sciences and Metaphorum.

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In Dialogue

Striving for Justice

Journeying with the Methodist Church in Britain

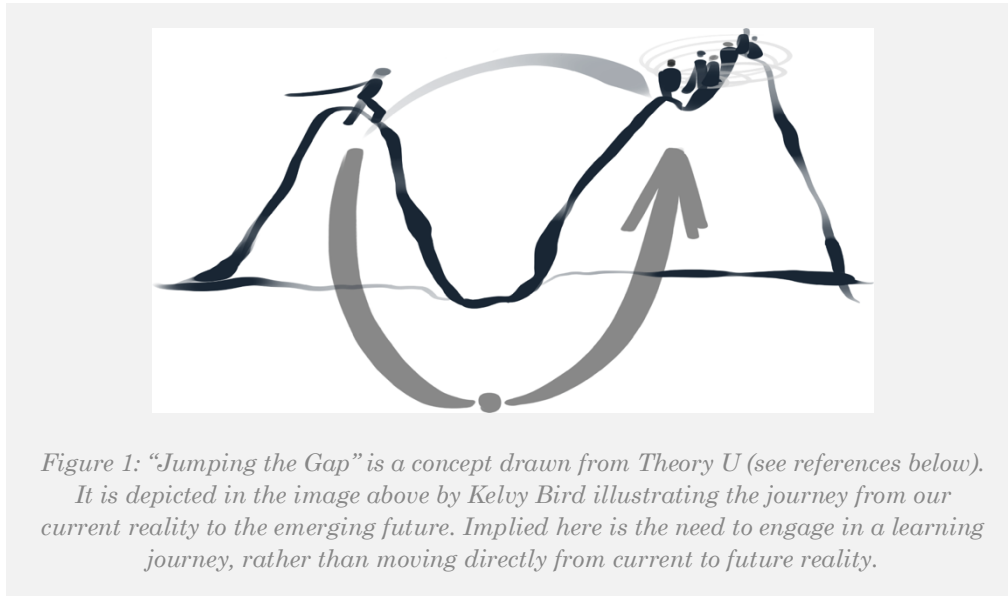
Ermal Kirby, Jill Marsh, Charity Nzegwu, Bevan Powell, and Adrian Roux
Methodist Church in Great Britain

Sue Miller, Megan Seneque
Susanna Wesley Foundation

Black ministry has historically found itself at the intersection of theology and racial justice. In this dialogue, a group of people, both ordained and lay, discuss their work in the Methodist Church in Great Britain, taking a deep look at self and system through the lens of justice and inclusion. The Methodist Church has a long history of grappling with issues of (racial) justice. In 2019, at a Racial Justice Symposium convened by the Methodist Church, participants engaged in an awareness-based systems change process to take a deep dive into what it means to shape inclusive community. Theory U (Scharmer, 2016, 2018; Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013) provided the overarching framework and key principles for this journey of co-inquiry.

Subsequently the Church has embarked on a complex process of discernment to determine how to bring justice, dignity and solidarity to life throughout all dimensions of the Church. This conversation uncovers personal motivations and key influences which have contributed to a sense of calling to this work, and to personal and collective action. The conversation illuminates the nature and qualities of awareness based systems change: it is characterized by self-

reflection, trust and honesty, being present to one another and listening profoundly to one another's stories, and it demonstrates an appreciation of the complex, multi-faceted nature of the transformation that is needed. The difficult work of avoiding the temptation to "jump the gap" from problem to solution, and to enable instead the journey of conversion, is revealed in dialogue (figure 1).



The following dialogue is an abridged version of a two-part conversation.

Participating in the Dialogue:

Ermal Kirby

Methodist Minister, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Committee

Jill Marsh

Methodist Minister & Implementation Lead for the Methodist Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity

Charity Nzegwu

Methodist Minister, District EDI/JDS (Justice, Dignity and Solidarity) Officer in the East Anglia District

Bevan Powell

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Adviser

Adrian Roux

Methodist Minister and Learning Network Coordinator for the Church's Southern and Islands Region

Dialogue Facilitators:

Megan Seneque

Research Associate: Susanna Wesley Foundation. Social process design, facilitation and research accompaniment.

Sue Miller

Director of the Susanna Wesley Foundation, Roehampton University. Research accompaniment.

The Dialogue

Megan: This is an invitation to be in conversation together and to bring our own personal motivations. What are we hoping for? Where do we think we might be taking the church on this journey of systems transformation, with a focus on justice, and on racial justice in particular?

Ermal: I was District Chair in the Methodist Church in the London District between 2006 and 2011, and in setting the parameters of our sense of belonging as a Methodist people within that, we were very clear that diversity and inclusion were important ingredients [within the newly formed District].

We tried at every stage and in every way to build on that, right from the inaugural celebration, all the way through. We are saying, “this is a dimension—justice, inclusion, recognition—that is an important part of what we are about”. I think that five and a half years into that experience, as I left that role of chair of the district and went out to South Africa, there was a sense almost of the project faltering - grinding to a halt; losing a bit of momentum and not being clear. What does it look like when we become fully inclusive?

In South Africa—I can’t say enough about how important and how transformative it was relearning the craft ministry in a totally different context.

Going there with this vision of the Rainbow Nation, all the euphoria of Mandela and the new beginning, and finding a situation in which the church is not one and the church does not understand what it means to be a united and inclusive church in South Africa.

Rainbow Nation is a term coined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu to describe post-apartheid South Africa, after South Africa's first fully democratic election in 1994.

The divisions were absolutely stark and real and no one had a model for saying, how do we get to the next stage, what does inclusion really look like in this situation?

And I said, actually, I think there’s some joining up that is needed: a conversation between what is happening in South Africa, or not happening, and

what was happening or beginning to happen, but had not been fulfilled in the UK.

Bevan: The first time I met Ermal, I was in the Black Police Association and there was a peace march. Another young man had been killed, and there was a peace march which was being organized by a number of Christian denominations, walking through London. We ended up in Brixton, in the square.

I remember there was a friend of mine from a Pentecostal background, I was a Methodist, and we said there is power here. Within the Black Police Association, it was driven by faith as well, our Christian faith. But I remember us saying that we needed to bring about change in London. It wasn't necessarily about the church, it was about trying to bring peace on the streets in terms of our young people killing themselves and the violence on the streets. And we said that we really needed to bring the churches together.

We started meeting different church leaders, and I remember Ermal was district chair at the time, and I remember approaching him and we were talking about this concept of bringing all of these different church leaders together. What we did was we got the Mayor's Office involved, which gave information from a local government perspective, in terms of what the challenges were, so that church leaders were able to have all the information to hand.

We did a survey where we had 2000 people respond in a week to the issues of violence. And we pulled it together. The Mayor's Office was listening, the police were listening, and I've always believed that the church had an unfulfilled role in leading society and bringing about peace in society and bringing about justice.

Then I left the Met and I became a counsellor, a political counsellor. Again, just looking at the issue of justice, and the whole thing around Grenfell was definitely about injustice, about not hearing.

"Grenfell" refers to a devastating fire which destroyed a residential tower block (Grenfell Tower) in North Kensington, West London, composed largely of social housing, on 14th June 2017. The fire killed 72 people, and injured over 70 others. The fire spread rapidly due to the building's external cladding. An inquiry found the exterior did not comply with regulations; residents had expressed significant safety concerns before the fire but had not been heard. The majority of residents came from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Those people were invisible, and all the things that are playing out in television now, that people had predicted that fire and they weren't being heard and the Transport Management Office and its arrogance, not listening to them. It's all part of the story that we're looking at in the church in terms of power and those people who are invisible, because they are different somehow. Whether it's because they're Muslim or they're non-White. I needed to take a break from local

politics and some of my national involvement. As God will lead these things, there was an opportunity to come and do this role in the Methodist Church.

The changes that we're trying to make in the Methodist Church, I see as much broader than just the Methodist Church. The JDS Strategy that we have is quite rightly focusing on getting our own house in order, to bring about a greater inclusion within the church and an inclusive church. But for me, I think it's one stepping stone in making us confident and bringing our light into the world and bringing change, and that's where I think we really need to be.

The JDS strategy refers to the Methodist Church in Britain's Justice, Dignity and Solidarity strategy, initiated following a report to Methodist Conference, the Church's governing body, in 2021. The strategy seeks to bring about a profound change in the culture, practices and attitudes of the Methodist Church so that all are able to be full participants.

For me, this is just a stepping stone, that we're able to embrace each other and to love each other and to respect each other. And to respect our difference. We've all spoken about this concept—which bothers me a little bit—living with contradictory convictions. It's a great concept, and if we can get it right it would be fantastic. But we're not proactive as a church in really teaching our members what that means.

Contradictory convictions: the term 'living with contradictory convictions' was initially coined in relation to discussions about marriage and relationships, particularly same-sex marriage, which has been a divisive issue within many Churches, including the Methodist Church. The Methodist Church has published a statement which, whilst acknowledging that there are issues on which not all agree, encourages people to be open and engage with one another, to seek to learn from another, and to show mutual respect, recognizing the truths which unite.

So, when it comes to some of the most sensitive issues that we're dealing with, whether it's an issue of race or whether it's an issue of homophobia or an issue around learning difficulties or whatever, they can become really polarized. And we've all witnessed, once you get to that point of polarization, people become entrenched. And because they're not able to challenge each other in a loving way, they're not able to really live out that living with contradictory convictions. They're not able to articulate that.

I think there is a challenge in our church to bring that understanding to our everyday members.

I see myself as an everyday member, because that's my starting point. I come to church for hope, for understanding. The everyday member comes to church with

their life, the challenges that they have in their everyday life, and they're looking for that hope. They're looking for something that connects them closer to God in a sense.

But there is a power dynamic between the ordained and those of us that are ordinary members, because there is a different lexicon, a different language and a different understanding. I see the JDS and the work that we've done together over the last two years as a stepping stone. And it links back to my first encounter with Ermal, which wasn't just about the church, it was about Londoners

So that's where I'm coming from, as well. But this is one cog in a much bigger machine for me, which is not just about the church. The church is important, and it has a way bigger leadership role than it currently occupies in my opinion.

Adrian: I really hear what Bevan is saying and when you speak of this gap between Christian academics and the person in the pew, that is perhaps one of the biggest failings of the church, because our message is one of incarnation - of actually making this all real in everyday language and everyday situations. And I think, in my journey, that is one of the driving things, and one of the particular failings that I see in the church that helps me to get motivated to get involved in something like this.

If we were to look in academic circles, there wouldn't be much debate that justice lies at the very center of the Christian message and what the church is about. But if you attend a church service outside of London, outside of the academic circles, outside of the academic institutions, the chance of hearing justice issues being the focus of the service is really small. And it's that giant gap; we've failed to disciple our committed members to the point that they realize we are a justice movement. That is what we are about.

We're not in the business of trying to provide a comfortable space in which people can come together and feel that they belong to the community—that's an absolute side issue. That's not what the focus of the church should be. But it is so often the focus of how churches are run, whether it's in South Africa or whether it's in the UK. And for me, I grew up in the Methodist Church, I was a child of the manse (accommodation for clergy), this was all in South Africa.

My real conversion moments were those when I met with people who were able to express to me about justice issues.

But we were pews full of people waiting to be disciplined, waiting to speak about justice issues, as Ermal pointed out, in a very divided South Africa.

Most of that work that we've done and developed from there has been in terms of racial justice, but I think we understand that we can't talk about it in a vacuum as an isolated issue. Really the issues that are facing us as a church, as a country, as a world, are all justice issues, and they're all coming in multiple forms. As much as we have failed to disciple as well as we might have, one of the real assets of the church that makes it really different to just about any other

organization, is that it should have at its heart, a core of people who are willing to serve others.

A core of people who are willing to get on with doing the right thing, not only when it suits them, but even when it costs them. And so really, we've got this huge, forget about our financial resources, we've got this amazing human resource that is committed in theory to justice, that is committed in theory to service, to helping, to caring. And I mean, we should be this unstoppable force in the transformation of the world. But we're running a coffee club on Saturday, so we haven't really got time to speak about these issues.

We really just need to raise our eyes a little bit, to raise our ambition a little bit, to decide, what is our primary thing that is really driving us.

Megan: Can I invite Charity and Jill as well, and I know that these threads will continue to be woven.

Charity: It's probably better to come to this from my lived experience. I have crossed boundaries, I am Zimbabwean and I've lived in this country for over thirty years. So, my experience of life has been in two or three places really. My experience of church has been both an African experience, and a British experience. But when I was at home, nobody talked to me about injustice either. When we talked about injustice, it was particularly in relation to the land and the land issue was a big issue.

These were questions in a young person trying to understand why I can't do this and why, when I go into the city with my parents, there were certain places my mum wouldn't let us go, because there weren't a lot of Black people there. It just didn't make sense. But I never really sat down with anybody who explained to me about injustice. I went to church and, if anything, the church reinforced this sense of injustice by being complicit and not saying anything about it either from the pulpit or in Bible study groups.

Then when I came into this country, I had the privilege of working as a nurse for about 25 years. I happened to have been around in 1995 when The Calman- Hine report in the National Health Service (NHS) came out. This was the first report that highlighted the NHS post code lottery in the country in the treatment of cancer. So that if you were diagnosed with cancer, but you lived in a particular post code, your chances of dying were higher in comparison to another in another post code - usually the post codes in affluent areas. For example, if you were in Newham, your chances of dying were higher than somebody in Kensington. I also happened to have worked in both boroughs, as a nurse and as a cancer services commissioner respectively.

I began to then realize that, actually, the things that we were talking about in church today, it is possible that the church is many years behind the secular world and behind the NHS in some areas of justice, because they've (NHS) been talking about these issues for a very long time. I was also involved in a research project which looked at how people from Black and ethnic minority groups were

unable to navigate the systems in this country. Not just NHS systems, but also the wider systems that they needed in order to lead their lives fully. It was pretty difficult to listen to some of these stories that were coming through and I wanted to do something.

Out of that piece of work, came the language and cultural Advocacy System for people diagnosed with cancer, which is now still being used in the NHS, so we don't have children advocating for their parents any more in hospitals, for example.

What annoyed me the most was, why was it these Black people in this particular area, were not being listened to? Irrespective of all the research that had been conducted, nothing had happened. Then I had the huge privilege of meeting Ermal when they brought the Zimbabwean and Ghanaian Fellowships together in 2008. I began to wonder why fellowships were not part of the church.

I then began to realize that actually, similar issues of injustice are also existent in the church, they were not being talked about in the church. When I started Local Preachers training, I was really fortunate. I had men and women, White, who began to talk to me about some of these issues.

They began to talk to me about issues of justice including race, gender. And actually, they brought something that was at the back of my mind to the fore. I realized, maybe this is what has been troubling me all along and I needed to find out a little bit more. While in that process, I went to South Africa on a mission trip.

I was shocked at my experience of South Africa and the South African Church. There is a lot of research out there about what is it that is stopping change from happening. Nobody is going to tell me that they are discovering anything new at all, it's all been discovered, it's all there. Why is it not being implemented?

I then began to realize that throughout the ten days I was in South Africa, everybody who led a workshop in South Africa was a White person, White woman or White man. The Black people were just there being recipients. That made me very angry. In other words, I realized that the issues of representation are not just an issue in the church in this country or the secular world, but also across other countries, into the world really. That kept giving me energy and I wanted to do something, I wanted to contribute, I wanted to make a difference in any small way I could. There are some voices that need to be magnified, there are things that need to be challenged. There are places where power is sitting, where it really needs to be challenged. We need to dismantle this power, we need to share this power.

Then I was introduced to liberation theologies. They began the process of giving me ways in which I can think about these things theologically, or articulate them theologically, because I was experiencing them. Up to this point, I had not developed a language to articulate what I was feeling, and what I wanted to express.

There is something in me that always tells me when there's something that is not right. I am still developing the language to express my thoughts and feelings. I have now realized that, sometimes people are marginalized because of the language that we use. We hide behind language, metaphor and terminology. That then means we don't have to explain a lot of things and engage in dialogue. I don't know whether the church is frightened of dialogue or frightened of talking to one another and getting to understand each other in that way. And so I think I have roughly just mentioned some of those things that have led me to this place.

Jill: I think the Methodist Church was really instrumental in me being aware of what we're all calling injustice, in a way that I probably wouldn't have been had I not been part of the Methodist Church. Having grown up as a child in different parts of the country, because my dad was a Methodist minister, I was kind of introduced to all sorts of different British cultures. Actually English, not even British. We moved round England, but the cultures where we moved were really different from each other.

And all the time I had my grandparent's home that I went back to every single school holiday, so about six times every year, until I was about 18. It was a White, working-class mining village, where people had outside toilets still and nobody ever went anywhere; nobody ever had any money to go on holiday except maybe one day at Mablethorpe. That was the culture.

So, I was kind of going backwards and forwards between that culture, which was White and English, and all these different cultures, depending on where my dad had been moved to. I think that was really important to me, just that awareness from the beginning. But I remember during that time, somehow getting the idea that we are all made in the image of God.

I remember being really challenged by that, because then whenever I met anybody who I really didn't like, I used to think to myself, "this person is made in the image of God". I need to stick with this person, not just dismiss them because I may not like them. They're made in the image of God so, actually, what can I learn from them?

We ended up living in Newham, and actually, Charity, I've never heard anybody else voice that thing about children translating for parents, but, as a teacher, that was all my school children's experience all the time. They were constantly being taken out of school to go down to the Benefits Office or wherever to try and explain, to translate all the time.

Being a teacher of kids in those situations, where they were being stopped and searched and all that, I've never really experienced any injustice for myself, but I've kind of felt it - the only way I can put it - as I've got to know the people who have been impacted. If you really care about the people you're meeting, you somehow get to feel it.

I've ended up in this conversation because of my job with the Methodist Church. And I think of it as getting to the bottom of things, and that's what it is when I

get there. I know I have a propensity to jump across and to go from what the problem is to what it needs to be. And I think actually, what talking with all of you has helped me see is that I do get to the bottom of things, but I don't necessarily think of it in that way. I'm doing it without realizing I'm doing it.

Megan: I think the point that you've just made, Jill, is there's not a lot of opportunity to make sense together, to actually unpick words and language and understand what we mean by that.

Ermal: I think that probably takes me into the next stage of sharing my experience which, is having done the collection of information for my research project and reflecting on it, there was no doubt in anyone's mind that something needed to change in their experience and in the experience of the Methodist Church. It was universally accepted: how things are at present is not how we want them to be or how we believe God wants them to be.

So that conviction of a need to change often went hand in hand with a sense of, "but we're not quite sure what it is that needs to change and how that needs to be changed". Those two questions are actually often connected and crucially important. What is the change that is desirable, necessary, and required, and how do we achieve that? I think for me, I became more and more convinced that it wasn't an answer that you discover by a magical formula, but it's a journey that you undertake with others. The people that we journey with, will help to shape the response that we discover.

It's therefore vitally important that the people with whom we are journeying be as representative, as inclusive as we can possibly make them. There will never be an entirely representative group, that's not achievable. But within the kind of parameters of our involvement to say, "Who should we be talking to about this, and how can we engage in respectful and continuing dialogue with them for as long as it takes for us to discover together what it is that we need to do?" That is vitally important.

I think someone said at some point in our conversation, there aren't enough spaces in our life together as a church where those conversations can happen. We are not structured for them. We work on a different model. We operate on a completely different basis, we have been stuck in the old jug to mug model.

Someone has the wisdom, the insight, and we pour it out in someone, and they take a cupful with gratitude and go away and sip it slowly and come back the week after for another fill up. We get locked into that cycle, that understanding. But until we can actually say, no, we are learners together. We sit at one another's feet and we are there to sit there, gathering round the feet of Jesus himself, and to learn together what it means. That for me is one of the very important parts of this process.

I think what we discover is that whatever we do in the room, and whatever we say to one another is impacted by the people who are not in the room. We are connected with them. It isn't "them". They are part also of us. While we can

never have everyone within the one space physically, that essentiality of our engaging intensely with the people beyond is equally important. And again, that is what we have not been good at.

Megan: It's recognizing that we are always in relationship, always. There's human potential and possibility and relationship, that's what we live in.

So these solidarity circles that Charity's talking about where people share struggles, the listening through lived experience that Jill's talking about, that you all refer to, it's actually about opening ourselves up. And the word presencing means being present to what lies dormant and is possible in and amongst us in relationship, in every single moment. Before we structure anything else, that's the starting point.

Charity: What I also discovered during these solidarity groups was that it was really important that these people are trusting of one another. And without the trust and without the confidence in each other, people are not as open. We lose out on people's wisdom, on God's voice through other people, because then people withhold, because they are not really sure what you are going to do, what your next steps are.

I think within the church we are still at that point where we still need to gain trust, and confidence with each other. It just puts us off engaging. So somehow we need to be a lot more transparent, a lot more trusting of one another and do what we say we are going to do.

Bevan: Can I just say something about the trust, because I do think that building trust and confidence is key to any engagement. Whether you create some new process in the church that you want everyone to engage in, if you haven't got the trust in it or you think there's an ulterior motive, you won't engage in it. I think we've still got some challenges to overcome in that area, even just in everyday encounters.

There is something about creating that environment where you can just be who you are and not judged as a result of it. There's an unspoken fear sometimes that says, if I raise this issue, somehow I am going to be "othered"; in a sense, I am the problem

Everyone's talking about identity politics and political correctness gone mad and all this kind of thing. "Wokism". For me, it makes our work more difficult in the church if we don't get to grips with it. It's recognizing that, for some people, they feel that their very identity is being eroded, and challenged to a certain extent.

Something that they've believed of who they are or who they thought they were and who they thought their families and their communities were, for probably generations upon generations, is being challenged. Whether that's an issue in terms of their perspective of the gospel—whatever the thing is that you've believed all your life—or you've come from a country where your whole socialization has informed your theology, has informed how you see the world.

Because some of that socialization has also been enshrined in legislation, for instance. That as a church, we invite people from all over the world, is quite right. But what we never do is give the opportunity to have a discussion about who you are, your socialization, and the things that you thought were normal and the things that you've never really challenged, because it was part of your day-to-day society. It was a part of your day-to-day living, your culture.

But all of a sudden you get here and it's "bang, no, this isn't right, we changed this legislation back in the 70s or whatever, and you're wrong". I've just seen more and more of that, not just about same sex couples, but in terms of race, we talk about White working class boys and all this kind of stuff. Well, they're all important, they're all people, and we have to recognize that this isn't about rowing backwards.

In our quest to become more inclusive, we may well be inadvertently pushing others out. I think the process is creating "others", in a sense, if we're not proactive in terms of including them within that conversation and creating very safe spaces where they can re-engage and reimagine who they are and challenge themselves in a safe space.

I think it goes back to the thing that I raised, this whole concept of living with contradictory convictions. It's all tied in, it might not make that much sense in the moment, but I do feel that unless we give the opportunity for those who have a slightly different perspective to us, and are not on board the JDS journey, I don't think it's good enough to say, oh well they'll leave the church and we'll become a new church.

I think there are people that sit on the fence or genuinely feel that they are being challenged for something that they see as being right. And they do not have the privilege that we do of sitting down and hearing Charity or Ermal or Megan and being able over a two-year period to actually, in a safe space, change our positions and challenge our position.

Ermal: It has been important to recognize that what we are doing, the journey we're on, is going to cost. I mean cost us, spiritually and emotionally. There is no painless discipleship.

Megan: So, the question for us to continue to explore is what does it mean to shape inclusive community, that is committed to justice in all its dimensions?

Ermal: I've been thinking quite a lot about how deeply embedded the instinct to jump the gulf is. We see a problem and we want to leap over to the other side. We want to have resolutions and regulations that determine the new life. I'm slightly puzzled and intrigued by how deeply rooted that seems to be, that there's a problem, we want to solve it, and we want to solve it now.

The second thing that struck me was that there does come a conversion moment where, at some point, it clicks in the minds of two or three others who are listening: actually there does need to be a more systemic approach, a more holistic approach. And again, I'm intrigued as to what it is that brings that

lightbulb moment when we suddenly say: yes, we might need regulations, we might need structures, but above all we need a change of heart

I'm interested in what is that moment of realization and recognition that helps people to move from the, "let's jump the divide" to "let's journey".

Lastly, I think that the willingness to commit to listening and journeying and finding the people with whom we are listening, and to whom we are listening, is extremely important. And the willingness of that group to say, it's not easy, it's going to take time but we believe that the journeying will take us to that new place.

In a number of areas, I'm beginning to recognize that it is that willingness to stay with it that makes a difference. But then I still haven't quite solved what is it that makes people say, "I'm willing to step out on this journey with you." Is that about personal relationship? Is it about the confidence in the person who's inviting you? Is it entirely of the Spirit that prompts from within? Is it all of the above?

Bevan: I think it is an ongoing process and within that process I think key is relationship building. So, Ermal asked a question, is it something about a personal relationship? Well, I think it is.

If you think about, why are we all doing this? It's something to do with our roles. I know that it's our role and our history, I suppose. I just look back at my own experience of all these issues and it is definitely is an iterative process of saying, right, this is the thing that we have to do today.

What Ermal said around why are we so quick to want to solve the problem and look at processes and procedures, well, I think because it is a quick fix, away from the church, and also within the church. You could say, "we have a procedure today" and everybody breathes a sigh of relief - we have something which will work and then we run with it. Because we need that moment of, I'll use the word peace.... a moment where we feel we don't have to be battling with this injustice or this quest to be perfect.

So, it gives this respite until it fails again or until it's proved that it's not quite working. And the relationship bit is the others around you that you have trust and confidence in, giving you the strength to continue. You have to believe in those around you that you are on the same road, you are on the same journey.

Charity: I think it's really difficult to try and solve problems that we really haven't given ourselves an opportunity to inhabit. Therefore, what we're always going to be doing, is using the head. And out of that emerges the fear, the need to control, the need to be successful and the fear of failure.

Because in these kinds of places, failure is something that we want to avoid with everything that we have. But actually, it's okay. To embrace failure as part of the journey towards transformation, for me, is really important. But more important to me, I think, are these questions that liberation theologians always ask: who is

benefitting out of what we are doing? Who is involved in what we are doing and whom have we left out and, therefore, what can we do differently?

I think that takes time to do. And it's not about trying to be better than we are, but it's about being real and accepting the realities within which we are living with. And the idea that I think somebody raised about building relationships, for me, is really important.

When I sense history repeating itself, it induces anger, frustration, resentment, and it doesn't help the process. So, how do we do things in a way that we all are kind of in the same space, understanding that this is about something new emerging from an existing relationship?

How do we make that better? And the idea that we have to be battling with the system is exhausting. It's tiring. When you see a little hint of that happening, it's draining for some. Maybe not for everybody.

I think the question I've been battling with is: if this God is real, how has this been a blessing to some and not to others? How do we sing from the same hymnbook and, yet respond differently to each other? How do we share the Lord's Prayer and actually not mean it? Because the manifestation of what we are doing together is at odds with what we are proclaiming together. So, how do we help?

I lament the loss of small groups within the Methodist church. Because, personally, I feel some of that needs to be at that intimate level. But everything just tends to be at a much wider or bigger plain at the moment. Those are the kind of things that I've really been battling, just trying to find ways in which we can reconcile our not being perfect but being on the journey to perfection

Adrian: Thanks, Charity. I think that's crucial for me this thing of not being perfect but being on the journey to perfection no less. I think there is this natural tendency - but whose natural tendency, I don't know - to want to jump across and get the quick fix and not go on a journey towards perfection, but just to be perfect. We see that in some of the bad theology that's around. But that jumping across, that desire for it, is that just an innate human thing, or is it a management thing when we're trying to run something? Management's always trying to handle things and control them and get them to a place. I wonder if that's not also just a part of, I'm going to dare to say, our culture, although I know we don't all share the same culture. But perhaps there's something that's infused from Western culture about being very solution orientated.

I wonder, just wonder out loud, whether we would find more of a journey mentality in perhaps some other cultures other than Western culture. I was intrigued with what Bevan said about us being here because of roles and history, and my immediate reaction was, no, I'm not sure I fit into either of those categories. I'm here because of my calling. I'm here because I think I can make a difference in something that I think is fundamentally important.

Perhaps we might easily call it about relationship, about community, about calling, whatever. But in the end, we're all reaching for this thing that drives us,

that's beyond words, that really completes us, that makes us whole, or we hope makes us whole, or puts us on that journey to being whole. We're all using slightly different words to experience a deep movement and a deep need.

I think often what perhaps is happening in the church, is that we hear this idea of conversion, and we think it means only one thing. It means one day I wasn't a Christian and the next day I was a Christian. Whereas actually, it's from one day I didn't believe to one day I did believe. One day I didn't see the need to one day I did see the need. So, if we just limit it to becoming Christian then we're actually failing to incarnate it and see the depth of it.

When we're talking about this journey or we're talking about discipleship or we're talking about relationship, those for me are all more or less the same place. Discipleship happens in relationship. There's a conversion element of it, of course, but it happens in relationship.

These are just simple religious words, but there's this gracious, loving acceptance of other people that enables them to be themselves and continue in the journey with us and with the community towards becoming all that they can be.

Ermal: Can I come back on this desire for instant fix and is it about control or is it about management, and all the rest? If you go back to the Genesis story, the account of the fall, in a way, that could be read as an account of an attempt at instant solution. You shall become like gods if you just take this step. You shall become wiser. You shall become much more powerful.

The paradox is that God is saying, I do want to share life with you, but do it on my terms, in my way. And the temptation, the deep human instinct is to say, no, we want to do it our way.

So, maybe it is both cultural and actually something about what we understand by fallenness that we are addressing in wanting to say, actually folks, this journey of transformation really does go deep, it is about challenging the foundations of your belief and your systems about how we achieve godliness, how we achieve holiness. Is it by regulation and structure, by grabbing, or by letting go?

There are three interconnected paths that we could be walking. One is about personal prayer and devotion. What is your personal relationship with God? The second is about the accountability and the encouragement. Who are you talking with about what you're experiencing and how are they encouraging you on the way? And the third is about social action, direct or indirect. What are we doing about what we have heard? How have we put this into practice? How are we putting this into practice, either in terms of our service in the community, or engaging with a situation further afield? Unless we are doing something with what we have heard when we gather together in church—it seems to me that our returning to church and to worship the next time becomes quite shallow and not as rich as it could be.

Charity: I really think that it might be helpful to have the leadership groups with much more diversity to start off with. Because it is the leadership who are then influencing what is happening elsewhere. I was fascinated when I came here. On my profile, I said that I had wanted to be in an ethnically and culturally diverse community, and I landed up in Royston.

Royston is a small town in the English county of Hertfordshire. It is not known for its cultural diversity, being predominantly White. In contrast, Newham, a borough within London, is one of the most ethnically diverse districts in England.

I really had to begin to think what diversity means. Actually, I found a lot more diversity in this place than I did in Newham, and it's been fascinating. It's been enriching. So, maybe it will be helpful to understand, to have some kind of a working definition of what we mean by diversity. But lead from the top. Whatever happens there, trust me, it influences what is happening everywhere else.

Bevan: Can I just pick up on what Charity's just said? I think I agree with it to a certain extent, and I think, definitely, it has to happen there. But we have to look at the environment from which the vast majority of our members are coming from. Because we're in a privileged position to be trying to engineer and direct change. Our members that come on a Sunday or come to fellowship groups, they're not part of this conversation.

Some of them will believe in helping others on the journey and in their relationship with God, but ultimately, they're trying to navigate their lives, locally. So, there's something about context and the importance to the individual and to families, locally. There's something about, I think, historical relationships as Ermal touched upon. Because that's critical.

We talk from a very privileged position. We talk about models. We talk about the being and doing. Well, the two go hand-in-hand, and when you're worried about putting food on the plate or getting your next job, or you're worried about violence next door, it's so far removed from what we're talking about. We have to be able to create that bridge. Our members want hope. They want peace. They want to be able to thrive rather than just survive.

And, yes, the middle classes—the chapel on the hill—can do that and look down at everybody else. That still exists today, whether symbolically or physically. I think the challenge for our church is that it's not just diversity in terms of ethnicity, or age, or gender, it's regionally. It's huge, it's complex. Rural, urban. We have to have understand that context. We have to walk in our members' footsteps.

What is the calling for all of this? Who are we serving, and engaging with? I understand we're serving God, but in terms of this process and this change, who is it for?

I would want to know what's happening locally. I would want to know the challenges for those in my church that I could go to and share and empathize with their challenges. So, this discussion is so far detached, for me at the moment, from their lives and it's a question of how do we create that bridge. I think there is a bridge, but I don't think that we're actually seeing it at the moment.

Ermal: I think my quick answer to what are we about, would be something along the lines of experiencing the fullness of life for all—that all people might have life and have it in all its forms.

The reality is that what we are experiencing in the Methodist church at present doesn't feel like an abundant life for many people and we are longing to see that happen.

Towards the start of the journey, we very consciously said that we are looking at that question through the lens of racial justice, initially. But we recognize that is only one set of lenses that we can use. What has also become clear to me is that the lessons we are learning through this process, need to be applied much more widely to the life of the church.

I think, if I hear him right, Adrian, that that's one of the points you keep on making. There is a deeper conversion needed in the life of the church in order that we might achieve that fullness of life for all. Not just in relation to racial justice but in every dimension of our living as a people of God.

So, what we are saying in this in-dialogue conversation is that we are discovering the importance of small groups, of solidarity circles. We are discovering the importance of staying, patience, and perseverance. And bearing the pain is an inescapable part of that. All of these lessons that we're learning, I think, then have to be translated into the wider context of the church.

That's where I've been fascinated: to see how the things that I'm learning in the course of EDI, JDS these conversations, they really do have implications for how we structure the life of our church as a people of God together, wherever we are, in whatever communities we are placed

It is making that connection, I think, that is going to be part of what I hope will come out of this. As I believe Gus John said in the 70's,—Black people have been the barium meal that revealed weaknesses, flaws in the body of the church. And what happened is that rather than using it as a diagnostic tool, we started treating the people as the problem. They weren't the problem. They were revealing flaws in the system.

And I think we've got another opportunity now to say JDS has taught us some important lessons about failures, and weaknesses in the whole body of the

church, which we are wanting to address, which is a systemic issue. I think that really is where we've come, not full circle, but we've moved on significantly in our journey and our understanding of the task that we are about.

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